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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

SACHIN TENDULKAR: LOVED SRIDEVI'S SENSE OF TIMING

MARCH 11, 2018 ₹50

THE WEEK

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Sridevi
The last diva

PLUS

She remained lonely in life and death, says **Shobhaa De**

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Letter from the Editor

THE FRAME IS a bit smoky. Nothing like the ultra HD experience we get today. But, the little girl framed by the trees and the bushes holds our attention. Clad in a short floral dress, her hair in pigtails, she behaves a little bit like a deer caught in headlights. Carrying a small, empty pot, she makes her way daintily through the undergrowth. The grassy field in front of her is all empty, but for a tethered, white cow. And, then, the camera zooms in on a crumbling grave in the long grass.

The child's face changes dramatically. Her lips quivering, her eyes spilling tears, she falls to her knees by the grave. "*Amma*, my hands are hurting," she wails, holding up her scarred palms. "Are you watching me? I'm always working. Yet, the *Ammachi* [older lady] scolds me, beats me. *Amma*, why did you leave me with her?" Realising that she has been away for long, she rises and bids farewell to the silent grave: "*Amma*, I'm going. If it gets too late, *Ammachi* will thrash me." And, with many a longing look at the grave, the child walks out of the frame, leaving us alone in the long grass, in that desolate field bordered by toddy palms.

That was a glimpse of Sridevi in *Poombatta* (1971). That role got her her first award: Kerala State Film Award for Best Child Artist. I was blown away by the strength of emotions portrayed by that eight-year-old child. At an age when other children are learning to tie shoelaces, Sridevi was a consummate professional. And, that was a trait she continued to display till the very end. Hence, this week's cover. Our tribute to The Last Diva.

While our columnist Shobhaa De analyses Sridevi's life and the challenges that come with great beauty and greater talent, the exclusive element is Sachin Tendulkar's tribute as a fan. When Manoj Warrier, an integral part of Team Sachin, told me that the cricketing legend admired Sridevi, I was sure that I wanted his tribute in this issue. When Sachin and I meet in Kochi during Kerala Blasters' games, our conversations mostly revolve around sport, and our cheers are reserved for the home side. So, this was a revelation. And, I was impressed by that one trait he admired in Sridevi: timing. Cricket fans have been awestruck by his timing in the middle. And, now, he says he was awestruck by hers! Thank you, Sachin, for wearing your heart on your sleeve this once.

It is often the attention to detail that separates average practitioners from geniuses. I'll stop with an anecdote narrated by Dhanya Kiran, news anchor with Manorama News. Kiran was a child artiste in director Bharathan's *Devaraagam* (1996), in which Sridevi essayed the female lead. Kiran says Sridevi was most affectionate to her. One scene was shot over two days, and on the second day, Sridevi said that there was something amiss with Kiran's hair. She was wearing it in a single plait that day, because the makeup notes said so. When the movie came out, Sridevi was proved right. Kiran had worn her hair in two plaits on the first day!

In Sridevi's passing, we have lost not only beauty, but a gifted actor, whose professionalism extended to things beyond her own role.

Philip Mathew

Philip Mathew

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HER LAST SCENE

Sridevi zoomed to the top of Indian cinema and stayed there for years. She was, undoubtedly, a darling of the masses. However, her onscreen persona was diametrically opposite to the reticent person in real life. This dual identity, in fact, must have been her biggest unresolved issue. And, maybe, we are all guilty of her untimely death, writes Shobhaa De

PLUS

- The cinema industry remembers an icon
- Exclusive: I have seen most of her movies, says Sachin Tendulkar
- Sridevi's journey in southern cinema
- She regretted not doing an all-out comedy, says director Priyadarshan
- Director Satish Kaushik says she could adapt to any genre
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Printed at Malayala Manorama Press, Kottayam, Print House India Pvt Ltd, Mumbai, M P Printers, Noida and Rajhans Enterprises, Bangalore and published from Manorama Buildings, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi-682 036, by **Jacob Mathew**, on behalf of the Malayala Manorama Co.Ltd., Kottayam - 686 001. Editor **Philip Mathew** • Focus/Infocus features are marketing/PR initiatives

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LETTERS

THE INDIAN MAGIC

YOUR COVER STORY on The Beatles took us back to the 1960s, when the rock band was a hit all around the world ('Riffs, the river and Rishikesh', February 25). People of all ages went crazy, hearing them sing and watching them dance. It is truly incredible to read that the music band, which created history, had visited India for a spiritual transformation. It is overwhelming to know that George Harrison loved India so much that he wanted to be born in India in his next life.

Arathi Raghuveer,
On email.

Kerala connection

YOUR COVER story on menstruation was interesting ('Akshay Kumar pads up', February 18). The taboo on periods is the outcome of religious beliefs among Hindus carried forward through successive generations.

The process of menstruation is revered and worshiped by millions as it happens in Chengannur Bhagawathy Temple in Kerala, where the presiding deity—Goddess Parvathy—menstruates every 27 days, known as *thripputhu*, even though it is a metallic idol. The loin cloth used on the deity during the period is considered sacred, holy and is a prized possession. It is sold for thousands of rupees. Sometimes, even auctioned. Yet, the temple practises untouchability, as during *thripputhu* it is closed for three days and a replica idol is kept deep inside the temple complex. On the fourth day, this replica idol is carried to the nearby river for a ceremonial bath (cleansing) and then brought back to the temple to the accompaniments of drums and traditional musical instruments.

Parur S. Ganesan,
Mumbai.

More Odisha coverage

I AM a reader of THE WEEK since the last 15 years. I feel the punch line of the magazine—Journalism with a human touch—is fully justified. The article published about Pipili, in my home state of Odisha, is an excellent example of such journalism ('Bad-luck bypass', February 18). THE WEEK is the only magazine in India which covers unbiased news with a human touch. But I am sad about the non-coverage of a sizeable portion of Odisha.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra,
On email.

THE WEEK

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GLOBE-TROTTING GLOBE || British artist Luke Jerram's acclaimed installation, titled 'Museum of the Moon', outside the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata on February 17. The Moon is a helium-filled sphere, seven metres in diameter, and features high-resolution, internally-lit NASA imagery of the lunar surface, accompanied by a surround-sound musical composition.

PHOTO BY SALIL BERA

POINT BLANK

I am all for kids not getting mobile phones till a certain age. Even when I have my own children, I will ensure this. Children need to step out, get some fresh air and make friends face-to-face on the football pitch.
RANVEER SINGH—*Actor*

If you look around the globe, there are very few countries where you have three important factors of economy together. They are democracy, demography and demand. In India, we have all the three together.
NARENDRA MODI—*Prime Minister*

Our learned people, after blaming everyone from Nehru regime to the Congress misrule, have said that auditors are to be blamed for the Punjab National Bank scam. Thank God they spared the peon.
SHATRUGHAN SINHA—*BJP leader, on the Union government blaming auditors and regulators for the fraud at the Punjab National Bank*

PTI

When we are able to achieve what we want to in the two tours [England and Australia], we will be more content. But our 80 per cent is also exciting. To be a world-class side, you have to be 100 per cent.
VIRAT KOHLI—*Cricketer, after winning the T20 series in South Africa*

There is no difference between the BJP and the Congress. Both the political systems have miserably failed to understand the real problems of farmers. For the last 70 years, we have been hearing banal promises.
K. CHANDRASHEKHAR RAO—*Telangana chief minister*

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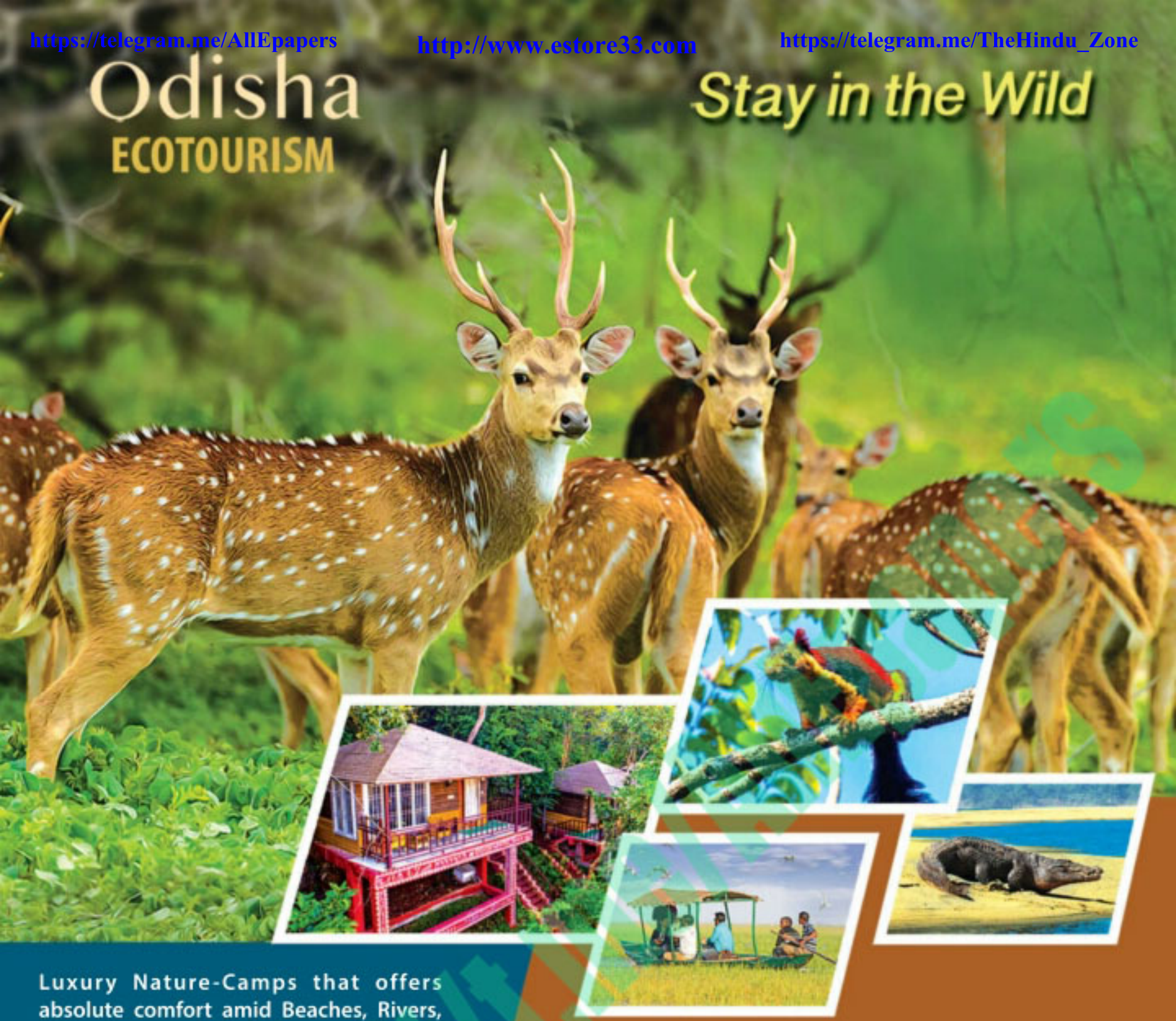

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power point • Sachidananda Murthy

Vocal warrior

Cabinet secretaries, who head the country's civil service, have normally been silent persons. The very fact that they rise to the top of the greasy pole, after tough stints, make them careful with words. They head anywhere between 50 to 60 committees at a given time, and deal with thousands of files a month, making them grim. T.S.R. Subramanian, who died this week, was a rare exception. He was a dynamo of an official, who would hold forth on various issues. He headed the bureaucracy during the weak coalitions of H.D. Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral and A.B. Vajpayee, which also helped him to be more forthcoming than if he had worked under a strong prime minister like Narendra Modi.

Subramanian had developed a reputation for speaking out for the bureaucracy in newspapers and television programmes, especially after his retirement. But when he was in service, there were complaints from some officials that they were pushed out of key positions to oblige prime ministers and powerful ministers. Post retirement, Subramanian was such a visible face on television (he lived close to Noida's Film City, where most English news channels have their headquarters) that many anchors called him cabinet secretary, omitting the prefix "former". He preferred to be a speaker and a thinker, than accept lucrative post-retirement assignments. He was one of the strong voices on reforming the bureaucracy during the anti-corruption movement launched by Anna Hazare, but he refused to join the movement. He had organised bureaucrats to petition the Supreme Court that bureaucrats in key positions be given fixed tenures.

His greatest, but so far unseen, contribution has been the preparation of a far-reaching modern education policy, commissioned by an enthusiastic Smriti Irani, after she became human resource development minister in 2014. Subramanian listened to all stakeholders, but did not pay heed to the priorities of the RSS, which was keen on developing the "right" education policy. His recommendations rattled the HRD ministry. IAS officers and heads of entrenched regulatory institutions like the UGC cried foul. Subramanian's recommendation for upping the spend on education to six per cent of the GDP alarmed the finance ministry. Finally, Irani herself lost enthusiasm. Her successor, Prakash Javadekar, too, has failed to tackle the vested interests, and the report remains under wraps. An internal committee has been set up to examine the pathbreaking recommendations. One of the objections against the report is that some of its recommendations would trample on the rights of the states.

BHASKARAN

Subramanian, in his last job, proved that he would rather be the voice of the people, than be any master's voice.

sachi@theweek.in

WORD PLAY

The budding crop of standup comedians in India will talk at length about the **snowflakes** in our country. Not the feathery ice crystals, but people who get easily offended or think they require special treatment. This alternative definition was recently added to the Oxford Dictionary.

The word was frequently used during the 2016 US elections by the political right to insult the left, and is now commonly thrown around on social media to mock those who easily take offence. The usage, though, was first popularised by the 1996 cult book *Fight Club*, and its subsequent film adaptation, with the quote: "You are not special, you are not a beautiful and unique snowflake". Moreover, a 'generation snowflake' is a millennial who thinks they are special, and are vulnerable. Which, if you think about it, is just a synonym for 'spoilt brat'.

MILESTONES

- **Green light:** China moved to remove the two-term restriction on the presidency, which will enable Xi Jinping to secure a third stint in the parliament elections in March.
- **Teen titan:** Afghanistan announced that spinner Rashid Khan, 19, will lead the team in the ODI match against Scotland on March 4. Khan will be the youngest captain in ODI history.
- **Slow and steady:** More than four lakh Olive Ridleys built nests at the Rushikulya coast in Odisha, breaking the record (3.65 lakh) of mass-nesting at the same site.

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APERITIF party snacks

HEALING TOUCH

UNION MINISTER ANANTH Kumar is determined to cap retail prices of medicines through the government's Jan Aushadhi pharmacies. His resolve is rooted in a personal story that he recently shared teary-eyed. In 1974, his mother, a cancer patient, was prescribed two tablets of Novodex a day. One tablet cost ₹20, while his father earned just ₹1,200 a month. To help make ends meet, Kumar's mother took just one tablet a day. As minister, he now believes that the government could truly touch lives by making medicines affordable.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JAIRAJ T.G.

Death-defying spirit

MUKUL ROY WILL lead the BJP's campaign in the run-up to the panchayat elections in West Bengal, due later this year. As convener of the party's panchayat committee, the former Trinamool Congress leader will be in charge of selecting candidates and deciding on campaign strategy. Referring to allegations that the ruling Trinamool was using violence to vanquish opposition parties, Roy said he was ready to take his battle to the *shamshan* (crematorium). "If they (Trinamool leaders) think that the battle would end with killings, then we are ready to take that battle to even crematoriums," he said.

Does Roy's appointment mean that he would lead the BJP's state unit in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and the 2021 assembly polls? "That depends on his performance in panchayat polls," said a party veteran.

The wife also rises

THE ELEVENTH ALL-INDIA national session of the Kirar Kshatriya Mahasabha was held recently in Kota in Rajasthan. Two chief ministers graced the event: Vasundhara Raje of Rajasthan and Shivraj Singh Chouhan of Madhya Pradesh, a Kirar Kshatriya himself. Chouhan was accompanied by his wife, Sadhana Singh.

As expected, Mahasabha members began by praising Chouhan's administrative skills that has made him the BJP's longest-serving CM. Unease, however, spread as senior members of the Mahasabha could not unanimously choose their next president. After long deliberations, they publicly nominated Sadhana Singh, surprising not just herself but also everyone else at the meeting. Sadhana, who hails from Gondia district in Maharashtra, quickly consulted her husband on the dais. And, much to the delight of the Mahasabha members, she accepted.

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Early bird

DOUBTS ABOUT THE true intent of Congress veteran Digvijaya Singh's five-month Narmada Yatra now stand dispelled. The former Madhya Pradesh chief minister, who wrapped up the yatra recently, will now embark on a tour of the poll-bound state, making it clear that he is angling for appointment as the Congress's chief minister candidate. Lending weight to Digvijaya's claims, the statewide tour was announced by Deepak Babaria, Congress general secretary in charge of Madhya Pradesh.

Awkward accolade

RECEIVING COMPLIMENTS CAN be embarrassing sometimes. At the Confederation of Indian Industry's 2018 Partnership Summit in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu shared the stage with foreign delegates. An American delegate took his admiration for Naidu a bit too far, suggesting that Naidu invite US President Donald Trump to the state. Why? "He can learn a thing or two from you," he said. To his credit, Naidu remained poker-faced.

Welcome break

MAMATA BANERJEE MAY be stingy when it comes to hiking salaries and dearness allowances of government employees, but she is generous in granting them holidays. Last year, the West Bengal chief minister allowed government employees to take a ten-day break for Durga puja. This year, she has announced a two-day holiday (March 1 and 2) for Holi. Thanks to their five-day work week, and the fact that the holidays fall on a Thursday and Friday, government employees can enjoy a long, celebratory weekend.

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sound bite • Anita Pratap

Norway's 39 Olympic medals

A thousand years ago, they wreaked havoc across the British Isles, plundering gold, burning villages and ransacking churches. Legends portray the marauding pagans as swift and merciless, prompting the quivering Celtic monks to pray: "Deliver us O Lord, from the fury of the Northmen." Those heathen Vikings are now Christian and peaceful, but they recently went back home with a cache of gold, envied by the world. Norway, a tiny country of 5.2 million people, topped the Winter Olympics in Korea, also creating history with a record haul of 39 medals, including 14 golds. The three highest individual Olympic medal winners are also Norwegian.

What accounts for Norway's astounding success? Strong and well-muscled, Norwegian athletes look like cyborgs from outer space. Nutrition and fitness rank high in this rich country. Viking ancestry probably embeds swiftness in their DNA. There is plenty of snow in Norway. And, top athletes compete in biathlon and cross-country skiing, where they can win multiple medals. But, many of these factors apply to other top competitors like USA, Canada, and Germany that have populations many times larger than Norway.

Norway's success comes from its unique socio-economic values, collective spirit and bottom-up system. Proud of their culture and determined to protect it from outside interference, Norwegians voted not once, but twice, to stay out of the European Union! Team spirit, trust, endurance, egalitarianism and inclusiveness are important, and are enshrined in politics, as in sports. There is zero tolerance for stars, divas and bad behaviour. Former olympic athlete Morten Aasen says, "We are a rich country, but we believe in the socialist way of doing things. Success comes from working hard and being together."

Every citizen is entitled to play sports, so Norway builds sports facilities everywhere, while other countries consecrate malls. Office closes at 4 pm, enabling employees many hours daily to hike, kayak or ski. Children's daily routine includes sports, but in the Norwegian system there are no winners or losers until they are 12. Kids have fun, enjoying rather than competing, and, 93 per cent of them enrol in the 11,000 local sports clubs. This broadens the talent pool. Tom Tvedt, the president of Norway's Olympic Committee says, "Our medals come from athletes who started in local clubs." If they show promise, they are taken to the elite sports centre called "Olympiatoppen". And, then, the other reasons for Norway's medal success kick in: world class facilities, training, coaching, sports science and technological innovation —for example, advanced skis.

BHASKARAN

Americans lament they fared poorly compared to Norway. American sportsmen follow the money trail created by golf, football, soccer, baseball and basketball. Athletes are insufficiently funded by the state. American figure-skater Adam Rippon, a bronze-medallist in this Olympics, tweeted that during his training "he was so broke" he stole apples from his gym to save money. But, Norway's sports budget is also small, and athletes cannot live on state grants. They all have day time jobs as carpenters, plumbers, farmers and teachers.

High performance comes from motivation fueled by love for their sport. "Norwegians are born with skis on their feet," is a popular saying. Johannes Høsflot Klæbo, the 21-year-old cross-country skier who won three gold medals epitomises this saying and the Norwegian system. His grandfather gifted him his first pair of skis when he was two years old, and, he belongs to the small Byåsen club in interior Norway. His name is unpronounceable, but, this six-feet-tall athlete has movie-star looks. No wonder, Donald Trump wants Norwegians to migrate to the US. They would also bring bushels of Olympic gold medals. A thousand years ago, and, 500 years before Christopher Columbus, Norwegians did land in America. But, they show no desire to migrate to Trumpland now.

Pratap is an author and journalist.

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forthwrite • Meenakshi Lekhi

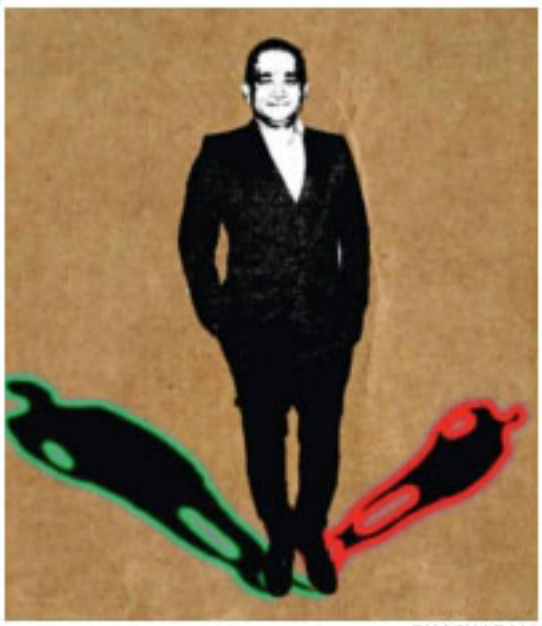
De-Congressising the ecosystem

In the last fortnight, the Indian political landscape was dominated by stories related to the banking scam that tumbled out of the cupboard of Punjab National Bank (PNB). The disappearance of the main actors of the scam, diamond merchants Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, kicked up a media furore. The mass outrage was justified as the escape showed a pattern crystallised during the UPA rule—cozy up with politicians, use the connection to get huge loans, round-trip the money and keep the scam growing, and when it gets too big for your shoes, leave the country to settle down in a European paradise.

The PNB fraud is an apparent case of systemic failure where individuals in collusion with influential businessmen exploited the loopholes of the system, while the monitoring agencies and regulators were caught napping. An underlining aspect of this episode, however, has been the swiftness and alacrity with which this government acted on the matter. Since the day the Enforcement Directorate registered a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, it has seized and attached movable and immoveable properties, including gems, jewellery, farmhouses, residential properties, offices and luxury cars, collectively worth more than ₹6,300 crore against a scam reported to be worth ₹11,400 crore. The hunt is still on.

Since the day the scam broke out, the Congress has been trying to foist it on the BJP. Ironically, the strategy backfired on them. First, the Congress claimed the scam came up during the NDA government's period. However, it emerged that the fraud of issuing forged Letters of Undertaking started in 2011, under the UPA. Then it emerged how Dinesh Dubey, an independent director of Allahabad Bank, who had objected to the loan proposals of Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi by writing to the Reserve Bank and the finance secretary, was forced to resign during the UPA's time. Third, a report came in the media that one of the upscale showrooms of Nirav Modi in Mumbai operated on a property owned by Anita Singhvi, wife of Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi. Fourth, Congress president Rahul Gandhi, who has been leading the attack on the NDA government from the fore, had attended a cocktail party hosted by Nirav Modi in Delhi in September 2013, and since then the fortunes of Modi started soaring high. The Congress is yet to explain why Rahul Gandhi hobnobbed with Nirav Modi and what benefits he got in return.

Corporate loans with fraudulent intentions were part of a well-functioning industry under the UPA regime. The phenomena of 'Congressisation' were not limited to the realm of politics but it had pervaded deep into the administration and banking institutions, work culture and professional ethics of the government. All sorts of regulators were culturally required to look elsewhere while the predators looted national resources. Now, the Modi government has begun the cleansing act. It has been tightening the noose around defaulters, leading to a scramble among corporates to sell their businesses to repay the loans. Today, while Jindal is selling power plant and rail businesses, Essar is selling part of its steel business and GVK is selling stakes in airports. DLF has put its prime properties on sale, while Jaypee Group is selling some of its businesses. The season of sales has reached to the doors of the likes of the Tatas, the Birlas and the Ambanis. Contrast this with the scams of the past, like those of Harshad Mehta and Abdul Karim Telgi, and you'll find no public money was recovered by the governments of the day.



BHASKARAN

Scams are a result of weak laws and poor regulatory mechanism. If the government responds in time and acts with honest intentions, the damage can be controlled and the loss minimised. This differentiates the Modi government with the UPA government. I believe, with honest intentions and swift actions, this government will be able to redeem the nation from the sins of the Congressisation of the past.

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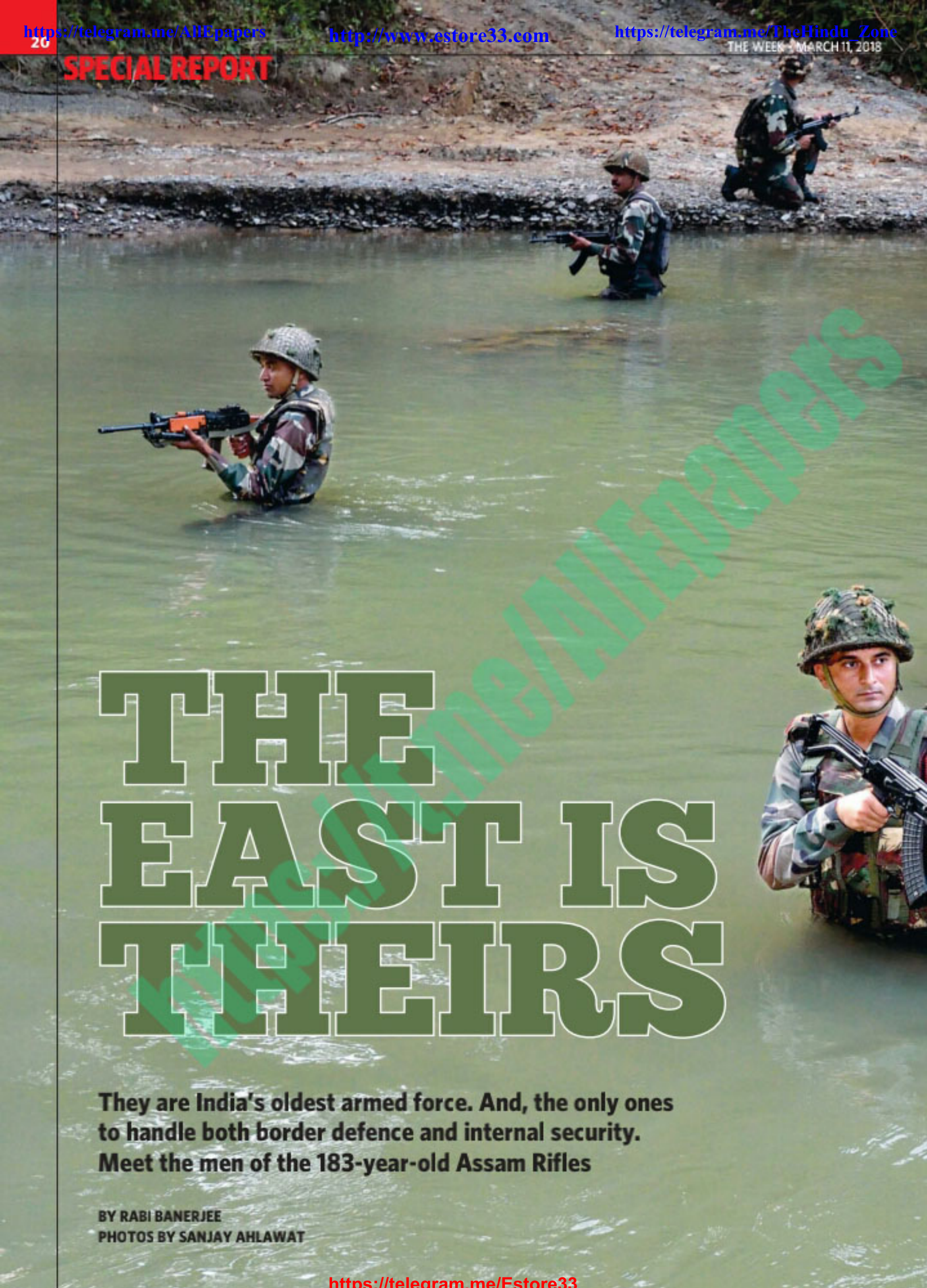

THE EAST IS THEIRS

They are India's oldest armed force. And, the only ones to handle both border defence and internal security. Meet the men of the 183-year-old Assam Rifles

BY RABI BANERJEE
PHOTOS BY SANJAY AHLAWAT

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River watch: Major Karmendra Krishna (centre), with his team, on patrol near the Myanmar border

Khalkhy is a little-known village in Saiha, Mizoram's southernmost district. It borders Myanmar, has no police station and no local government. The people on both sides of the border have the same ethnicity. And, a Free Movement Regime (FMR) allows people from both sides to travel up to 16km beyond the border without a visa. The FMR was intended to facilitate social and economic interaction among the border tribes, and it is a relief for those with kin across the border.

In May 2017, around 340 Myanmarese—all Christians—entered Mizoram through Khalkhy. Assam Rifles learnt of their entry and sent out a patrol. Forty soldiers forded rivers and trekked through forests, carrying supplies. It took the patrol five days to reach the point of infiltration.

The soldiers tracked the infiltrators down and learnt that the group, including women and children, was fleeing the persecution of minorities in Myanmar. The soldiers did not drive out the refugees immediately. Instead, they gave them food, water, clothing and medicines, and set up tents for them. In the absence of a civic body in the area, the Assam Rifles took up the refugees' case with the Myanmarese administration. "We could not allow them to stay in our country," said Brigadier M.S. Mokha, deputy inspector general at the sector headquarters of the Assam Rifles in Aizawl. After several rounds of talks, the refugees were given a safe corridor in Myanmar, and they returned home.

A few months later, the Assam Rifles prevented infiltration attempts by militants. In September, it captured a heavily armed group of the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA), terrorists from Myanmar's Rakhine province (see box: Operation Kaladan). In October, a few other

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SPECIAL REPORT

militant camps in the area were dismantled. These instances resulted in additional forces being deployed in the region. As Myanmar boils with ethnic clashes, Rohingyas and other minorities are camped just beyond the 1,600km-long international border. More than 50 terrorist outfits are operating in the area. "We keep round-the-clock vigil even in the remotest areas now," said Mokha. "Our boys stay there without proper food and sanitation, often dealing with wild animals."

The 67,000-strong Assam Rifles is the oldest armed force in India. It has 46 battalions and 12 sectors. Raised in 1835 as Cachar Levy (Cachar is a district in Assam), it was renamed Assam Rifles in 1917. The ongoing induction of women into the unit has been an essential component of reforms. According to Lieutenant Colonel Arindom Ghosh, public relations officer, Assam Rifles, the force plans to recruit around 2,400 women over ten years. He said 127 women were recruited last year. Their primary task would be frisking women and interrogation of female apprehendees.

Assam Rifles is the only force in the country responsible for both internal security and for securing an international border. Though it is a paramilitary force that technically falls under the ambit of the home ministry, Assam Rifles is commanded by the Indian Army and its operations are directed from Fort William, Kolkata. Seventy per cent of the officers are on deputation from the Army. The rest are from the Assam Rifles cadre. Amid the mixed character and complexities, the soldiers are proud to be part of the Army, which gives them all kinds of training—commando, paratrooper, combative, anti-insurgency and so on. But, pride alone does not keep up spirits. Many soldiers mentioned that Assam Rifles cadre were not given the same emoluments and benefits as Army personnel.

Many Army officers who have served, or are serving, with the Assam Rifles said that they wanted the force to have the same benefits as the Army does. The catch is that the home ministry, and not the Army, has the final say. A senior officer of Assam Rifles, from the Army cadre, said, "Unlike other paramilitary forces, Assam Rifles is better equipped, trained and always at the warfront in the northeast. There is no difference between them and Army officers. In fact, Army personnel often get peace transfers, but Assam Rifles never do."

The Daggers: Captain Vaibav Joshi (second from left) with his team at the battalion headquarters in Serchhip

To understand the lives of Assam Rifles personnel, THE WEEK travelled to Champhai district of Mizoram, which borders Myanmar

OPERATION KALADAN, September 2017

Lomasu village in Saiha district is the remotest part of Mizoram. It has no road connectivity and it takes days to reach from Aizawl, the state capital, about 200km away. The Assam Rifles sector headquarters at Aizawl learnt that a group of heavily-armed Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) militants were camping in Lomasu, on the banks of river Kaladan.

Forty men of Battalion 1 were deployed. They drove for around 60km, and then trekked through the forest for two days to reach the river. They took a boat from there, abandoned it 20km from the camp, and walked again. It took four days for the team to reach the camp. "We stormed the camp and caught the terrorists off guard," said Colonel B.B. Pun, who led the team. "There were eight of them. One was cleaning the ammunition, while the rest were listening to music. We first neutralised the man who had the heavy arms and ammunition. The rest tried to flee, but were caught."

Hundreds of grenades, a cache of automated machine guns, M16 rifles, grenade launchers and ammunition were seized in one of the biggest arms recoveries in the history of the Assam Rifles.

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and is known as the hub of narcotics trafficking in India (according to local police, ever day narcotics worth ₹100 crore are traded here). The company of the Assam Rifles at Champhai is known as the Daggers. Two young officers—Captain Dhruv Gaur and Major Karmedra Krishna—drove us to Champhai from Aizawl. Driving through forests, it took us about 12 hours to cover 220km. A part of the road called the World Bank Road—constructed by the Mizoram government, with financial help from the World Bank—has almost disappeared because of lack of maintenance. Kishore Kumar songs like 'Chala Jata Hoon' and 'Geet Gata Hoon Main' made the back-breaking journey bearable. The only halt was at the commandant headquarters of Battalion 10 in Serchhip district. The headquarters is surrounded by places of worship—for Muslims, Christians and Hindus. The commandant, Colonel Brijendra Singh, said: "What can we do here, in such an interior place in the country. Our boys guard the country inside the forest, neck deep in water. At times, we cannot even give them medical assistance. It is only prayer that keeps them going."

When we reached the Champhai camp, a long, clean room with rows of cots and a television welcomed us. Soon, we met rifleman Umesh Dwivedi, who was preparing to go deep into the jungle for duty. Last June, Major Vaibav Joshi received a tip-off that Manipuri militant groups, now based in Myanmar, were going to infiltrate into Mizoram at Farkawn border, where there is dense jungle cover. Interestingly, the source was won over with a bottle of whisky, because of the liquor prohibition in Mizoram. At the border, Joshi ambushed two people who were carrying heavy bags. The militants lashed out with knives, leaving a gash on Joshi's forehead. He fell to the ground, but retained his hold on the bags. The militants, who Joshi said were Manipuris, fled and the team

A force like no other

A look at the Assam Rifles, India's oldest armed force

- Raised in 1835 to **guard tea gardens**
- Escorted the **Dalai Lama** to India in 1959
- Deployed in **Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka**, between 1988 and 1990
- Major terror outfits being tackled at present include **National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)**, **People's Liberation Army** and **United National Liberation Front of Manipur**
- Fought against **Subhas Chandra Bose's INA**
- Deployed to tackle **insurgency in Kashmir** in the 1980s
- Arrested **four chief ministers** of Mizoram, when they were militants

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SPECIAL REPORT

Interview/*Lt Gen Shokin Chauhan, director general, Assam Rifles*

Handling the insurgency in the northeast is as difficult as Kashmir

BY RABI BANERJEE

LIEUTENANT GENERAL Shokin Chauhan believes in strong actions against militants, to bring peace in the volatile northeast. In 2012, the home ministry had decided to give the task of guarding the Indo-Myanmar border to the Border Security Force. But, according to sources, the move was thwarted by the Indian Army. Chouhan feels the Assam Rifles is best suited to deal with the twin roles of securing the border and tackling insurgency. Edited excerpts:

Is it not a tall order to guard the border and fight insurgents at the same time?

There are a large number of underground camps in Myanmarese territory. The underground cadre is also active along the Indo-Myanmar Border (IMB) and the hinterland. The operations along the IMB and hinterland are intertwined.

Is it problematic to do both jobs?

The Assam Rifles has a unique understanding of the challenges in the region and is most suited to do these linked tasks.

How are they linked to each other?

All the underground cadre operate from camps in Myanmar. After operating in Indian territory, they slip back to the safety of their camps. These groups operate both in the hinterland and along the IMB. Therefore, their activities are linked. So, counterinsurgency and guarding the IMB are linked.

Should different forces perform these tasks?

Deployment of different forces would create disjointedness in operations. Challenges due to tough terrain and inclement weather are further compounded by the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and lack of fencing. Hence, only a force with in-depth knowledge of both internal aspects of insurgency and border dynamics can succeed here. Assam Rifles has been performing both these roles with great success. Bringing in another force will undo all that has been achieved. In fact, the need of the hour is to further empower the Assam Rifles.

Is handling the northeast more difficult than handling Kashmir?

Both have their own challenges. Certainly, the handling of insurgency in the northeast is as challenging, if not more.

In 2012, there was a declaration by both the director general of the Assam Rifles and director general of the Border Security Force that the BSF would man the IMB. What happened after that?

I do not want to comment on this, except that the Assam Rifles continues to perform both roles. I am sure it will continue to do so in the future, too.

But, shouldn't there be specialisations within the Assam Rifles for border management and counterinsurgency?

I have suggested to the home ministry that border management should be under one inspector general, while two other IGs would look after the hinterland. This way, specialisation can be achieved without sacrificing coordination.

How does the Assam Rifles perform the dual job?

We have a three-pronged approach, which ensures the security of the people, who are the top priority, along with area domination and overall development of the region.

For full interview, log on to www.theweek.in

recovered five AK56s and ammunition. Joshi proved that Manipuri militants were using the Mizoram border to smuggle narcotics, arms and personnel into India.

Since then, soldiers like Dwivedi go out every night to guard the thickly forested border. "I am proud that I am part of this group which defends the country," said Dwivedi, who is from Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh. "I am also proud of the fact that I received training from the Army, which is uncommon for paramilitary forces. But, at the end of the day, I am sad that I am not treated as an Army man by society."

Dwivedi's late father was in the Army. He said he cannot get treated at the Army hospital, like his father. Likewise, his medical benefit is under the Central government health insurance scheme, which does not allow him to get treated at any private hospital. "I have to stay in the northeast," he said. "I am from the plains, so I often fall sick here." He joined the Assam Rifles after his tenth stan-

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Spreading joy: (Left) Assam Rifles jawans distribute sweets to orphans at Champhai; jawans at their barracks in Champhai

dard, without knowing much about the force. "I had no idea about the Assam Rifles," he said. "I thought it was the same as the Army."

Like Dwivedi, P.B. Reddy, too, has come from afar. Son of a poor daily labourer from Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, Reddy also confused the Assam Rifles with the Army. Reddy has transitioned from a thatched-roof hut to a small, but proper, house thanks to his job with the Assam Rifles. He is happy with the food and other amenities. "People in other paramilitary forces complain about the quality of food only because they sit idle," he said. "We remain in the forests for 15 days at a stretch, so hot food is a luxury." He said heavy food makes one slow and sick in the forest. "We eat heavy food when we return to the barracks after long duty [in the forests] or after operations."

Reddy wants to leave the force and go back, but he said he would not be able to get a job as he would not be treated as an ex-serviceman. "We are neither here nor there," he said.

If treated at par with Army personnel, the salary of an Assam Rifles jawan would be almost double the current ₹35,000. Rifleman Shyam Lal, from Rohtak in Haryana, said even postings at peace stations would be a welcome break. "We have to stay inside the jungles and in the hills until retirement [at 60]," said Shyam. According to him, despite so much sacrifice and toil, they have to invest ₹15,000 per month in unit linked pension plans. "You don't have any idea how many of our colleagues died of snake bite and how dangerous our life is," he said.

The commanders use innovative methods to keep their troops happy. "As a company commander I hold tea sessions on a regular basis," said Major Anil Khandelwal, commander of the Daggers. "We try to find out the issues which the jawans avoid discussing." He has 120 jawans under him. Leaves are granted liberally, and the soldiers are given air tickets till Kolkata (from Aizawl) and then AC-two tier railway tickets to their home station. After every successful operation or achievement, there is a *bara khana* (good food spread) with drinks. The officers also lead from the front during combat. The Assam Rifles is apparently the only force which has lost almost the same number of officers as jawans.

Major Nitin Bagri exemplifies this spirit. Known as one of the finest officers in the Assam Rifles, Bagri was retained in Jiribam, Manipur, despite his tenure there being over. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream railway project for Manipur,

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SPECIAL REPORT

Nagaland and Mizoram, which starts from near Jiribam, was being stalled by militant activity. Twenty railway contractors and dozens of railway employees were abducted by militants. "The railway line passes through the forests, and the place was a den for militant groups," said Colonel Narendra Singh, commandant of Battalion 37, which is posted in Jiribam. "But once they started targeting railway projects, we intervened and created an outpost at the railway station." Singh said there were 37 arrests in 100 operations in the past one year. "And, almost all of the operations were conducted by Major Bagri," he said. "We are worried about his life, as he is on the hit list of militants."

How exactly did Bagri make it to the hit list of terrorist groups? "Because, I sent troops into the forest every day to attack them," said Bagri. "I did not kill them, but arrested them. I uprooted their network and broke their extortion racket." The militants laid booby traps for him several times, and he admitted that he would have been dead had it not been for his jawans. Rifleman T.H. Amulya Singh, from Thoubal, Manipur, pushed Bagri away from a land mine just a couple of months back.

You have to climb 550 feet from the nearest road to reach Bagri's camp, which is on the highest peak in Jiribam. As I started gasping for breath during the climb, Bagri laughed and ordered his men to prepare tea and food immediately. He introduced me to his boys. Zahir Khan, 34, from Akhnoor in Jammu and Kashmir, joined the Assam Rifles a decade back. His father was in the Army, before militancy spiked in J&K. Due to the complex situation in his home state, he could not join the Army. "What can I do, sir? I did not study much," Zahir said. "I had to buy land after marriage, and my father had also died. There was a lot of burden on me. So, I decided to join the force, as it was the only alternative."

As we were driving back to Aizawl, we were accompanied by Captain Jayprakash, who was in his late twenties. Near Ngopa, Mizoram, we pulled over next to the statue of a former Assam Rifles officer. Lieutenant Colonel Giridhar Gopal died fighting Mizo National Front (MNF) insurgents led by Laldenga (later, Mizoram's first chief minister) in 1979. Every Assam Rifles convoy passing this way stops here. After jawans lit lamps at the foot of the statue, Jayprakash saluted it. He then called out names and ranks of everyone in our team, committing us to Lt Col Gopal's protection. "We believe in this," said the captain. "People who did not do this in the past have met with accidents on the way. In the northeast, it is very easy to become a martyr."

And, then, Colonel Brijendra Singh's words came back to me: "It is only prayer that keeps them going." ◆

Constant vigil: (Above) Assam Rifles jawans guarding the ongoing railway project near Jiribam, Manipur; Major Nitin Bagri, with his team

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pmo beat • R. Prasannan

Malice from the Maldives

Keen to make big friends and influence distant powers, Narendra Modi has been on a diplomatic overdrive these four years. In the process, he has been neglecting his neighbourhood.

Modi came to power mocking at Manmohan Singh's "love letters to Pakistan", and boasting of a 56-inch chest. Since then, India has been getting it on all fronts in the western theatre—on the LoC, on the IB, within the valley, and even in Pathankot, Punjab. More of our troops were killed in the last two years than in any other earlier year.

To the Chinese, it was Manmohan who showed a brave chest. He raised a mountain strike corps and two new divisions against them, and moved Sukhoi squadrons and BrahMos regiments up close. The Chinese behaved.

But they have been nasty with Modi. Slighted over Modi's rejection of his invite to the belt-and-road jamboree, Xi Jinping sent his road-builders to Doklam on the Bhutan border. Modi sent troops to scare them, and a border stand-off followed. A face-saver deal was worked out, but we still don't know who blinked. Even our military chiefs don't know. The air chief says the Chinese are still there; the army chief says they aren't.

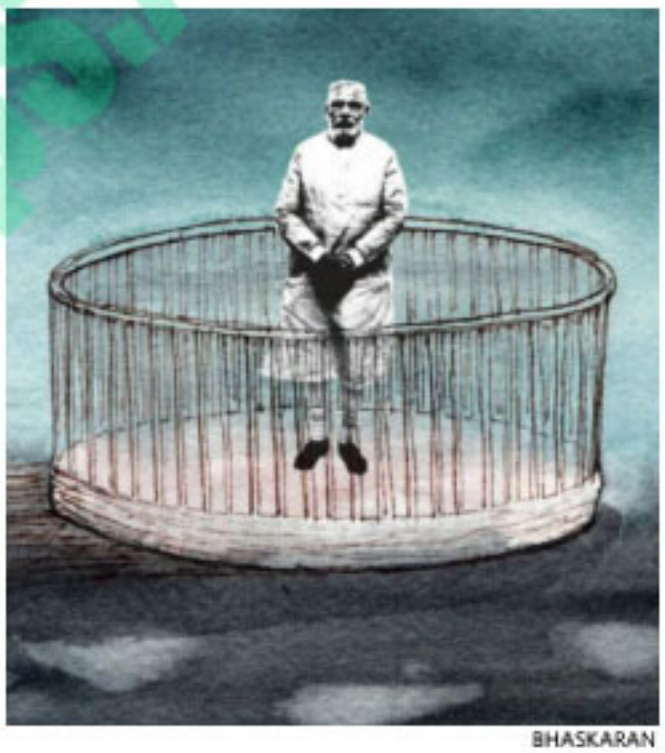
The Bhutanese, once the most docile and the only ones who stood with us against the belt-and-road, are now said to be slipping into China's lap. The Lankans have been managed—just about. They have stopped hosting Chinese warships in their ports, but their Hambantota port has been leased to the Chinese.

The Banglas are helpful, but that is because the Sheikh Hasina regime survives on a pro-India constituency. But the lady is making more enemies every day with her high-handed ways, and any outburst of opposition fire against her may scald India, too.

The Nepalese, who supply us the most loyal troops we can ever recruit, have been turning difficult, especially after Modi sent his foreign secretary to tell them how to write their constitution. They believe India had engineered the blockade of goods and fuel trucks to the Kathmandu valley a year ago. They are now waiting for the rail track from Tibet to Nepal be completed for goods rakes and fuel wagons from China to chug in.

The most painful slap on India's face has come from the Maldives, once India's friendliest neighbour, now ruled by a China-friendly president. He came in through a coup which India couldn't prevent, and then exiled his predecessor. Now he has imposed an emergency regime, sent judges to jail and is pretending not to hear India's words of caution. The unkindest cut of all was his refusal to send his Coast Guard, essentially a patrol-boat flotilla that has been groomed, armed and trained entirely by India, to join the India-hosted multi-navy Milan exercise.

India has been building a grand security dome across the Indian Ocean, but a truant Maldives could undermine it. The dome would stretch from the Malacca Strait to the Horn of Africa, and from Diego Garcia to the Gulf of Oman. Singapore is letting us dock our warships in their port. The Seychelles have let us build radars on their coast to scan the seas, and even agreed to lease us their Assumption Island for building naval berths. Oman has been persuaded to lease land to India to build a base. Next week, Emmanuel Macron will sign a deal allowing Modi to berth our ships in France's Reunion Islands near Madagascar and in Djibouti. Mauritius is willing to lend us Agalega island to build naval rigs. There is already a logistics deal with the US which gives us access to Diego Garcia.



BHASKARAN

Indeed a grand security dome over the waters! But it could prove to be a bubble in the water, if the Maldives choose to prick it by hosting Chinese and Pakistani ships coming in from Gwadar.

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DIPLOMACY

REUTERS

Hugs and howlers

Although major deals were signed during Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visit to India, it was overshadowed by controversies

BY PRATUL SHARMA

Indians love Canada, for it has always welcomed aspirational and hard-working immigrants looking to change their fortunes. As many as 1.24 lakh Indian students got Canadian study permits in 2017, an increase of over 60 per cent from 2016. It is also a favoured tourist destination, with 2.24 lakh Indians having visited the country in 2016. And, more and more Indians are making Canada their home. In 2016, as many as 40,000 Indians became permanent residents of Canada.

On February 17, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau arrived in Delhi to take India-Canada ties forward, infusing it with his personal charm. Trudeau's visit, however, was overshadowed by a spate of controversies. To begin with, the Indian ministry of external affairs was not happy about the scheduling. The visit, which lasted almost a week, was dominated by private engagements. The business part of the trip came only towards the end, and lasted barely a day. Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose not to receive Trudeau at the airport. Modi, instead,

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Big push for friendship: Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives the Trudeau family at the Rashtrapati Bhavan

sent his junior minister for agriculture. He did not even tweet a welcome. The Trudeau family's sartorial choices and the money spent on the trip were questioned both in India and in Canada. The Canadian government is yet to disclose the actual cost of the trip.

A far more serious issue that overshadowed the visit was Sikh separatism, and the support it enjoys in Canada, especially among members of Trudeau's Liberal Party. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, known to be a staunch critic of what is perceived to be Canada's soft approach towards Sikh separatism, met Trudeau in Amritsar and gave him a list of nine Khalistani terrorists wanted in India. The names in the list included Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Malkit Singh, Gurjeet Singh Cheema, Gurpreet Singh and Gurjinder Singh Pannu. These five are members of the banned International Sikh Youth Federation, and have been under the scanner of Indian security agencies for routing money to fund terror activities. Similar charges have been raised against the remaining four in the list as well, but no cases have been registered.

The invitation extended to Canadian terror convict Jaspal Atwal to an event hosted by the Canadian high commission in Delhi, too, snowballed into a major controversy. Although the invitation was rescinded, the damage had already been done. There were photographs showing Atwal with Trudeau's wife, Sophie, at an event held in Mumbai on February 20. After he returned to Canada, Trudeau hinted that the Atwal controversy was choreographed by "rogue elements" in the Indian establishment, although Canadian MP Randeep S. Sarai took responsibility for inviting Atwal. The MEA said charges of Indian involvement were baseless and unacceptable.

Notwithstanding the controversies, Modi received Trudeau with his customary hug on February 23. The two countries signed six memorandums of understanding to increase cooperation in education, sports, intellectual property rights, information technology, and science and innovation. Canada also acknowledged India's freedom of navigation and over-flight throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Both countries agreed to collaborate on increased funding and support for women entrepreneurs. Canada announced $7.9 million to support women's

INDIA DIARIES

Trudeau insisted on travelling in India to feel the pulse of the country. He said India and Canada must "deepen and broaden" their "historic friendship"

FEB 17, SATURDAY: Arrived in Delhi. Received by Minister of State for Agriculture Gajendra Singh and Indian Ambassador to Canada Vikas Swarup

FEB 19, MONDAY: Gujarat. Met Chief Minister Vijay Rupani. Visited Sabarmati Ashram, Akshardham temple and IIMA

FEB 20, TUESDAY: Mumbai. Met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and business leaders. Interacted with Bollywood stars

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DIPLOMACY

FEB 21, WEDNESDAY: Punjab. Met Chief Minister Amarinder Singh. Discussed trade, cooperation in agriculture and service sectors. Assured him Canada does not support any separatist movement. Visited the Golden Temple

empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, water and sanitation, and mental health. The Vancouver Film School announced the opening of its campus in Mumbai. Agreements on shooting Canadian movies in collaboration with Indian crew were also inked.

During the visit, Indian and Canadian companies signed 66 contracts worth $1 billion, which would create 5,800 jobs in Canada. Indian companies will invest $250 million in Canada, while Canadian companies will invest $750 million in India. Canadian real estate major Brookfield agreed to acquire Essar Group's 1.25 million square feet office complex in Mumbai for $480 million. Leading Canadian financial company Fairfax will acquire a 51 per cent stake in the Kerala-based Catholic Syrian Bank Ltd. This $200 million transaction marks the first instance of the Reserve Bank of India allowing a foreign entity to own a controlling stake in an Indian financial institution.

Both countries, however, failed to conclude the Canada-India Foreign Investment Protection Agreement and the Canada-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which would have transformed bilateral trade relations. Negotiations on the two deals have been going on for the past five years. At present, bilateral trade is worth only $8.3 billion. Trudeau's visit is expected to help improve the figure. "The visit has infused new energy into trade ties," said Kasi Rao, CEO of the Canada-India Business Council. "Trudeau brought his charisma in engaging with the Indian business community."

The joint statement issued by Modi and Trudeau reaffirmed the breadth and scope of India-Canada relations, and stressed the respect for sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the two countries. India and Canada also signed a framework agreement to counter terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation, and specifically named terror groups like Al Qaeda, Islamic State, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Babbar Khalsa International, and the International Sikh Youth Federation.

Vishnu Prakash, former Indian high commissioner to Canada, said the controversy over the presence of Khalistani elements in Canada had helped to create a debate in Canada on the issue. "This is perhaps for the first time that the Canadian public is realising the significance of the Khalistan issue," he said. "Canada is the only country which still gives a platform to the Khalistanis. This acknowledgement by the government and the public is the first step in addressing it."

Trudeau's India visit shall also be seen from the context of national elections due next year in both countries. It was natural for Trudeau to reach out to the 14 lakh-strong Indian diaspora, which constitutes 3.6 per cent of Canada's population. Of these, nearly five lakh people are Sikhs. Trudeau has four Sikh ministers in his cabinet, and all of them were part of his entourage.

Prakash said India and Canada complemented each other quite well. "Canada has everything that India needs, be it food, uranium or good education," he said. Priti Singh, associate professor at the Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, said a lot of positives emerged from the visit. "Despite the misgivings about the visit, it ended well," she said. "Issues were sorted out in the end, when Modi and Trudeau met." ◆

FEB 23, FRIDAY: Bilateral talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Discussed counterterrorism, extremism and trade. Signed six pacts. Also met External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. Visited Rajghat

FEB 22, THURSDAY: Delhi. Canada-India business meeting. Announced that the visit had yielded investments worth over $1billion that will generate 5,800 high quality jobs in Canada. Visited Jama Masjid and the Sacred Heart Cathedral

RESEARCH: KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH, PRATUL SHARMA

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PASSING

Seer, and doer

Jayendra Saraswathi was a unique spiritual leader who impacted the course of national discourse and politics

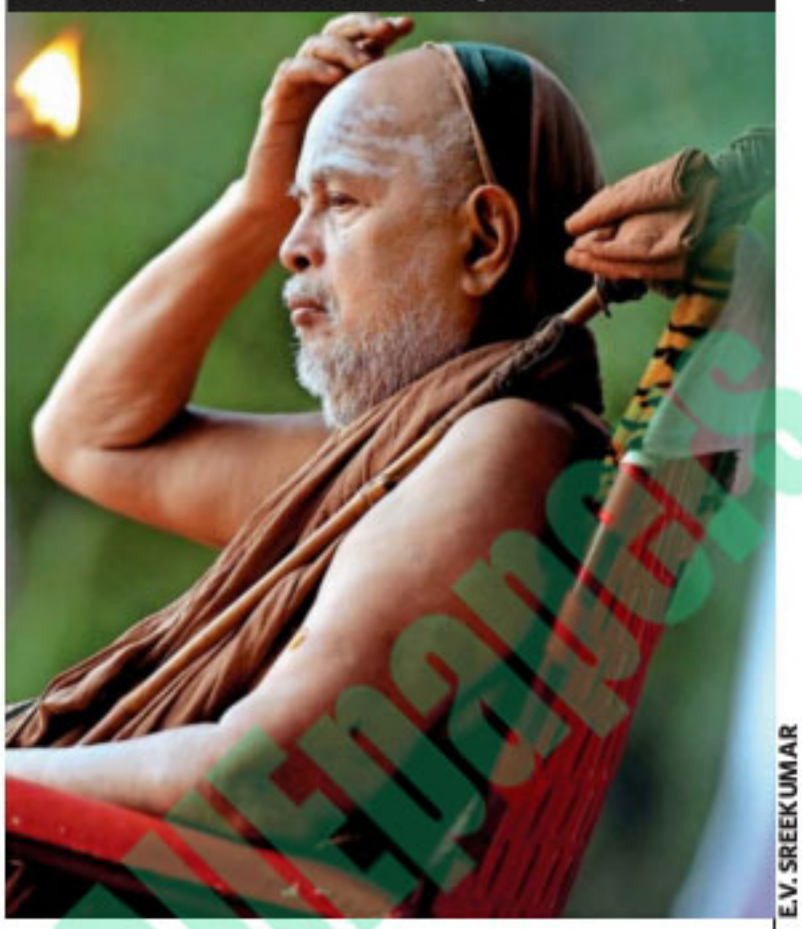
BY SACHIDANANDA MURTHY

Outreach and controversy were two aspects of Sri Jayendra Saraswathi's personality. If his guru Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi was an ascetic whose silences sent stunning messages, the volubility and hyperactivity of Jayendra—the long-serving pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham in Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu—were a marked contrast, bringing both exemplary fame and unwelcome controversy to a religious institution that claims 12 centuries of existence.

Unlike many *sanyasis* of the *mutts* founded by Adi Shankara, who are ordained into *sanyasa* at the tender age of eight, Subramaniam of Mannargudi was given the ochre robes and the bamboo staff of a *jagadguru* when he was 19. By then, he had studied Sanskrit scriptures, but had also understood the tides of religion, caste, and modernity transforming post-independence society. His guru insisted that Kancheepuram should be a *gnanapeetham* (a seat of knowledge), but the successor *jagadguru* found that such spiritual concentration was not enough to remain relevant. The orthodox followers of the senior guru looked askance as Jayendra Saraswathi searched for answers.

Jayendra wanted the *mutt* to go beyond its brahminical core of spirituality and ritual. He was deeply moved by the decision of a village of dalits, in Meenakshipuram, to convert to Islam, protesting the inhuman untouchability practised by caste Hindus. He wanted to bring everyone into the Hindu fold, but the conservatives opposed. They were even against Jayendra's plans to travel across state and country by automobile rather than on foot, as his 68 predecessors had done. The pressure became so acute that, in 1987, he disappeared from the *mutt* with a couple of trusted followers. It caused a global sensation, and there was a nationwide lookout even as his successor was asked to take charge. Days later, he emerged at Talacauvery in Kodagu, Karnataka, where the Cauvery takes birth. He said God had told him to launch a movement for public welfare, but before that he had to take *sankalp* (a resolution) in isolation. His return to Kancheepuram in a new Maruti van—with its seats removed and where he sat on a deerskin—made him a national figure.

JAYENDRA SARASWATHI (1935 - 2018)



E.V. SREEKUMAR

The next two decades saw him crisscross the country, expanding the *mutt* enormously, launching many health and education schemes, bringing in dalits and backward classes into the fold, and getting involved in the resurgent Hindu movements led by Vishva Hindu Parishad.

As a Shaivite *jagadguru*, he was an invaluable addition to the Vaishnavite religious leaders dominating the VHP's *dharma sansad* (religious parliament). He also attracted many top politicians, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, George Fernandes, Jaswant Singh and J. Jayalalithaa.

The expanding empire of the *mutt* on the secular side also meant large property transactions, which brought in newer people to the inner circle, upsetting the old guard in Kancheepuram. It was at this juncture that *mutt* employee Sankararaman was murdered on campus by hired killers. Fingers were pointed at the *jagadguru* and his junior, Vijayendra Saraswathi, and Jayalalithaa ordered his arrest on Diwali in 2004. He spent two months in jail, but was later acquitted with honour by a special court in Puducherry.

While the welfare activities continued, the *swamiji* spent more time on religious discourses. He was a superstar among the modern-day *jagadgurus*, but too much proximity to the temporal world and its ways had its rewards as well as reverses. In the end, Jayendra Saraswathi was a unique spiritual leader, who impacted the course of national discourse and politics. ◆

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FAREWELL, SRI...

Sridevi's life remains incomplete, like a book with the final chapters missing

BY SHOBHAA DE

Bollywood is bereft. A dark blanket of gloom hangs over India's entertainment hub. Understandably so. When the news of Sridevi's tragic and dramatic death in Dubai spread like a prairie fire on Saturday night, more than shock, there was utter disbelief. It sounded impossible. Inconceivable. Even absurd. Sridevi? Dead? Never! Wasn't she the most elegantly dressed guest swaying to bhangra beats at the high-profile, glamourous family wedding just a few hours earlier? And, a few hours later, poooooof! she was gone! Well... death has a nasty way of abruptly snatching the world's most luminous stars and placing them in a cold, celestial firmament. Sridevi was death's latest trophy—not just a dazzling star, but an entire galaxy unto herself. Bollywood is a far dimmer, far less glittering destination after her loss.

I will not take the usual 'tribute' route, and claim any special closeness to Sri over the years that we knew each other. Let me focus on her

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COVER STORY

devastated husband—the portly Boney Kapoor—instead. And, provide two comparatively recent incidents that might illustrate the scale of his devotion to the woman he fell in love with at first sight. A month or so ago, I was chatting with a mutual friend in the lobby of a posh Delhi hotel, when Boney walked in, spotted us, and came straight up to me with an accusatory expression in his eyes. "You did not like *Mom*," he declared. It was not a question. He had read my opinion on a blog. Before I could reply, he added, "Sri was so fantastic in that role—she is the best!" It was a flat statement and needed no response from me. I offered none. He was like a wounded grizzly bear, puzzled and hurt that anybody in this world could not see and appreciate what was so evident to him—Sridevi's perfection. He was obsessed with his wife, and made no bones about it. We exchanged numbers, and that led to a steady stream of images of Sri sent by her *fida* hubby—Sri in Russia, Sri at assorted events, Sri laughing, Sri rejoicing. Every single image was accompanied by a gushing description of Sri. I was touched and amused. I chuckled, "The man is besotted after so many years. Lucky Sri!"

Soon after that encounter, I ran into Sri and shared the almost daily exchanges between me and Boney. She laughed indulgently, and said, "He also sends the same images to me, in case I have missed seeing them. I feel so embarrassed! Each time I dress up to go out, he clicks pictures and says, "Look! How beautiful you are! This colour really suits you!" It may have been our last interaction. I did spot her at Tina Ambani's uber glam 60th birthday celebrations a few weeks later, but we were at opposite ends of the lawn. For a minute I didn't recognise the statuesque stunner, clad in a clinging red gown (with lipstick to match), glossy hair cascading on to her bare shoulders. She looked no more than 30 years old. That night, she was as she remained till the end—aloof and silent, not moving around and greeting members of her fraternity. She left socialising to her more talkative husband. The same love-struck man who, according to media reports, had to suffer the ultimate misfortune of discovering his beloved wife's body in a bathtub, after allegedly breaking down a heavy bathroom door.

The songs and dances she made immortal are being watched over and over again, as admirers strive to deconstruct the Sri magic. That is going to be a near impossible challenge. Sri was enig-

SANJOY GHOSH

Exclusive interview/*Sachin Tendulkar, former Indian cricket captain and Rajya Sabha member*

Loved her expressions and sense of timing

BY SUSAMMA JOY KURIAN

Mumbai has been home to many a dreamer and doer, shoring them up till they find their footing and realise their dreams. Sachin Tendulkar and Sridevi belong to this motley bunch of achievers. Though their paths never crossed, Tendulkar did follow Sridevi's dream run in Bollywood. "I have watched most of her movies," he tells THE WEEK. And, he has enjoyed them all. The cricketer in him understands the importance of

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matic and mysterious. Not by design, I might add. I believe she was painfully shy and extremely diffident in reality. Always guarded, always watchful. It was only when the cameras were rolling that she actually came to life. She had a magic switch within, perhaps. A switch she activated exclusively to perform on film. It was only the reel life she gave herself to sans inhibition, sans filters. This dual identity may have been the biggest unresolved issue in her life.

Such is the irony of Sridevi's story that she remained lonely in life and lonely in death. Surrounded though she was with all the trappings of wealth, she may have been completely emotionally bankrupt within. If one can rely on speculative accounts of film industry people, especially those who knew her as a frightfully young child actor down south, she lived and died in isolation. A trapped, fragile bird. I looked at a photograph of a prepubescent Sri, sitting bare-chested on [former Tamil Nadu chief minister J.] Jayalalithaa's lap, and my heart broke. She must have been six or seven at the time. And, already working full-time in an exploitative industry. We know very little about her as a person, what she went through, what she felt... she preferred it that way. She barely opened her mouth on the sets, and stayed away from parties altogether. When she arrived in Bollywood, it was with a highly controlling, domineering mother in tow. Producers accepted the package deal reluctantly. Journalists keen to crack through her expressionless, stony facade, came away frustrated—her standard response to any question was, "Ask mummy." After mummy died, Sri seemed lost for a while, as if she were looking for some straw to cling on to. Well, she found a large rock instead. Boney appeared on the scene and took total charge of her life. It must have been an exceedingly hard period for her, as she was labelled the 'other woman' who broke up a loving marriage. Sri, unwittingly, was following in the footsteps of her predecessors from the South—gorgeous stars like Vyjayanthimala, Hema Malini, Rekha and Jaya Prada, all of whom had fallen for married heroes after coming to Bollywood. Her meteoric career was pretty astonishing, and hugely successful. This, for a reserved, secretive girl who spoke not a word of Hindi, but was willing to work hard and make it, no matter what it took. Well, Sri certainly made it. And, how! Hema

timing and delivery, and that's what bowled him over as Sridevi lit up the screen with her acting. Edited excerpts:

1989, the year you made your debut in cricket, was the year of Sridevi in Bollywood. *Chandni* had released in September, followed by *Chaalbaaz* in December. Have you seen those movies?

Of course, I have (laughs). We all grew up watching her, even though I was playing for India then. Those were the school days, and also after that whenever her movies were released we would watch [them]. We were all big fans of her who enjoyed the skills that she had.

Which was the first movie of hers that you saw?

I don't exactly remember the first movie, but I would say I have watched most of her movies.

And, your favourite was...

My favourite, without any doubt, is *English Vinglish*. I think she was too good in that movie. Her acting was superb. [She was] an amazing woman. Whenever she was in front of the camera, she was spectacular.

She took a break from movies in 1997, shifting her focus to her family. Did you wish then that she had continued acting in films by taking on fewer roles?

It is an individual's call, which one should respect. Everyone has their priorities.

We should respect that. [We should] appreciate the movies that she has given us to cherish rather than [talking] about what she didn't do for us. [We should] appreciate what she has done for us.

Though most of her films were commercial, she never compromised on her roles. She played a range of characters. Do you think that's what made her different from her contemporaries like Jaya Prada?

Each actor is different. He or she has his or her own style of acting, and that is how it should be. Otherwise, there will be monotony. When it comes to her [Sridevi's] movies, she has done a spectacular job. Whenever I have seen her movies, I have enjoyed them.

She was known to be a shy person. But she would light up the screen with her acting. What do you love about her?

I think it was her expressions and sense of timing. For any actor, the expressions and sense of timing become critical because that is how you engage the audience. The same thing that she says [when] said by someone else may not have the same impact. So, that thing has a lot to do with timing and the delivery. I think she was amazing. I have heard that she was a shy person. But the moment she heard 'action', her eyes would light up and she would be a different person. That was the special ability she had.

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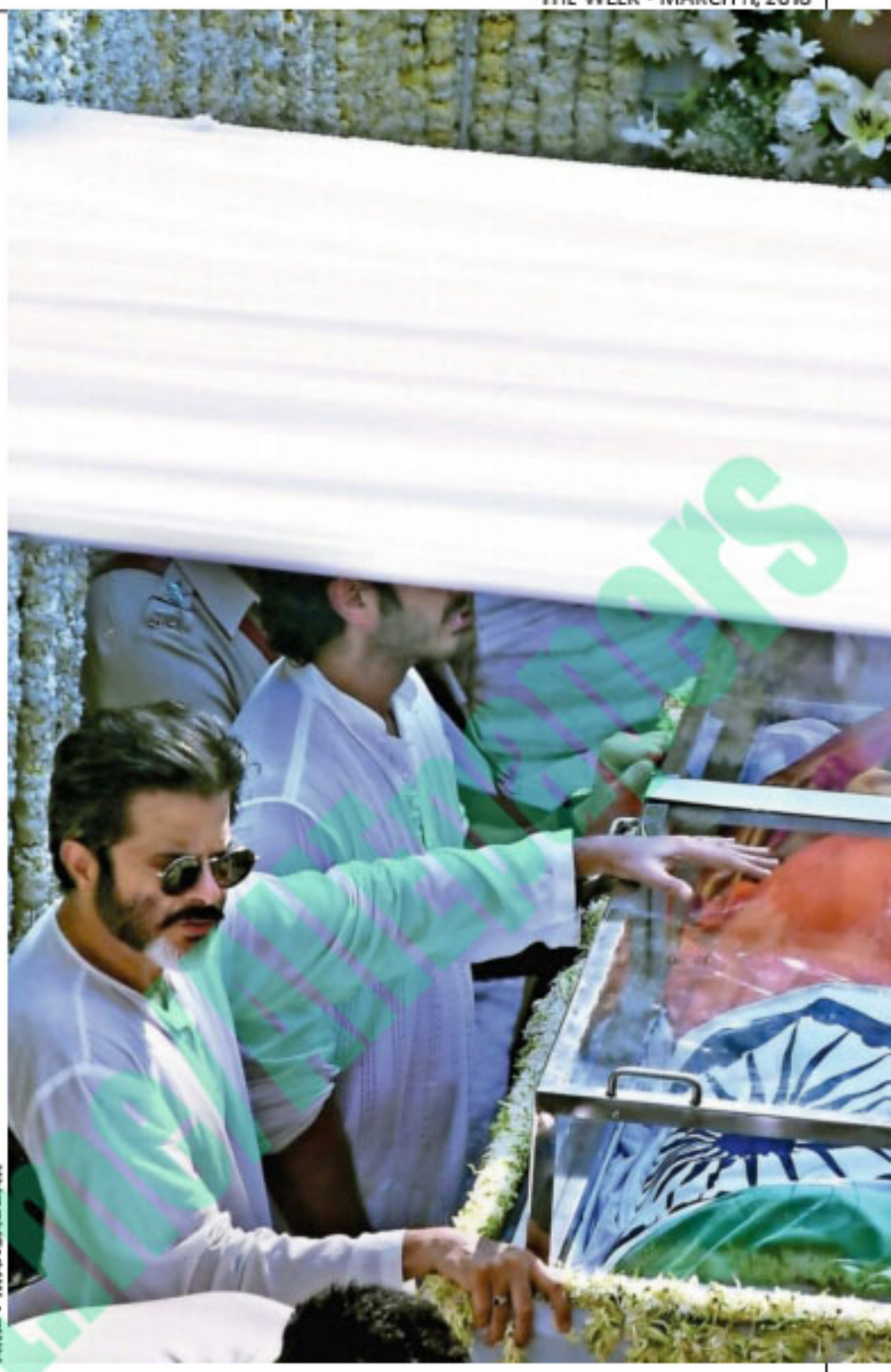

AMEY MANSABDAR

FINAL JOURNEY
Sridevi's funeral procession in Mumbai. Anil Kapoor (bottom left) and Boney Kapoor (top)

Malini in her tribute said, "Sridevi was born to act." Too true. One superhit followed another, and she became the unchallenged darling of the masses. Some of her 'item numbers' are iconic today. But when you watch the clips, it is obvious that Sri was bringing something extra to the table that the others didn't possess. Call it the X factor. Or, plain oomph. I call it 'Sri-ness'—an irresistible combination of sexuality and innocence. A voluptuous body with a child's wide-eyed face.

What could possibly have gone wrong in her carefully scripted fairy tale? She bagged the man, married him and produced two lovely girls. The film industry treated her with utmost respect, which she had rightfully earned over the years. In retrospect, perhaps it was too perfect a life! Who knows what demons haunted her, once the make-up came off, and she stepped out of the elaborate couture garments and heavy jewellery that had become her trademark of late? She had no known friends in Bollywood, even though everyone claimed to like her. Did they even know Sri? Did she know herself? Or, had she inadvertently become a prisoner of her own image?

Someone sent me the link to the last commercial she shot. It will be released posthumously. It shows Sri playing a 'super cool', 'happening' mother. She is animated and vivacious, as she dances to rap tracks, her mobile face and expressive eyes, delighting and charming audiences

THE FRATERNAL FEW

A look at some of Sridevi's costars and directors who influenced her career

BHARATHIRAJA, *director*

Sridevi's performances in his critically and commercially successful Tamil films *16 Vayathinile* (1977) and *Sigappu Rojakkal* (1978) made her a bankable actor in south India. He also directed *Solva Sawan* (1979), the Hindi remake of *16 Vayathinile*. It was her debut as a lead in Bollywood

BALU MAHENDRA, *director*

Sridevi won a state award for her performance in his *Moondram Pirai* (1982, Tamil). It was remade in Hindi as *Sadma* (1983), arguably her best performance ever for its nuanced theatricality

KAMAL HAASAN, *actor*

They were paired together in 27 films across languages. Kamal and Sridevi often brought out the best of each other. They made the audience, who were primarily used to potboilers, appreciate slower cinema

GRAPHICS: DENILAL; RESEARCH: KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH, LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

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SRIDEVI'S BODY WAS OFFICIALLY HANDED OVER TO SOCIAL WORKER ASHRAF THAMARASSERY, WHO IS ORIGINALLY FROM KERALA, FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION OF THE FORMALITIES. ASHRAF, ALONG WITH OTHER DUBAI-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS, OFFERED ASSISTANCE TO THE KAPOOR FAMILY AS THEY WERE UNAWARE OF THE REPATRIATION PROCEDURE.

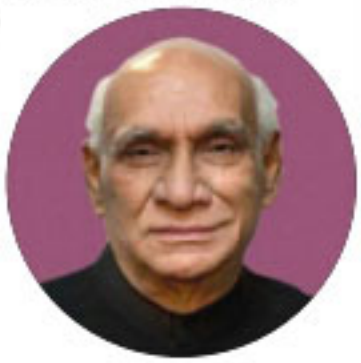
once more, reminding them painfully of the star they had showered unconditional love on for thirty-odd years. The void Sri leaves behind will be hard to fill. Like [Marilyn] Monroe. Like Whitney Houston.... she will be deified in death. And, glorified forever. This is how it works for very beautiful, very gifted, very fragile stars who die under mysterious circumstances, and die early. Though, one wonders: what is 'early'? Would we have responded differently had she passed at 64, and not 54? Most certainly. Sridevi's life remains incomplete, like a book with the final chapters missing. Her young daughters have a gigantic legacy to take forward. Her death has certainly acted like an overdue wake-up call for thousands of women who have been trying desperately to cling on to unrealistic self-images of youth and perfection. Maybe we are all guilty for Sridevi's untimely death. We never wanted her to age. And, she tried a bit too hard not to disappoint us. ♦

SHEKHAR KAPUR, *director*

Through *Mr. India* (1987), Kapur gave her a chance to play a different kind of role that meshed together comedy, drama and sensuality. Kapur gave Sridevi a free run in the movie. When she was performing, he opted for longer takes

YASH CHOPRA, *director*

His romantic saga *Chandni* (1989) starring Sridevi was one of the biggest blockbusters of the year. He cast her again in *Lamhe* (1991), which won her critical acclaim. These films cemented her position as the top female superstar in India



JEETENDRA, *actor*

Sridevi was paired with Jeetendra in 16 films and 11 became box office hits, including her first commercial success in Bollywood, *Himmatwala* (1983)

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COVER STORY

A WOMAN OF FEW WORDS

Though she was an introvert, Sridevi was considerate and knew whom she wanted to be friends with

BY PRIYANKA BHADANI

I remember approaching Sridevi for an interview at the launch of a fitness product in Delhi, in 2007, where she and her husband Boney Kapoor were special guests. She widened her big, bright eyes as she looked across the dinner table where Kapoor sat. Having taken a break from acting to raise her two daughters, Sridevi wasn't seen very often; either on-screen or off it. Her last screen appearance at the time was on the TV show *Malini Iyer* (2004) and her last major film was *Judaai* (1997). She was known to be reserved and reticent—someone who spoke very little, who often directed queries to her mother, Rajeswari Yanger. On that day, too, it looked as if she was seeking permission from her husband.

But people who knew her say she was a very strong-willed woman who could take her own decisions. However, she depended a lot on her family—father, mother, sister and brother—in the early stages of her career and eventually on her husband.

"Boney spelt security in her life. He was her constant support. And, I think they learned to be inter-dependent," says veteran film journalist Bhawana Somaaya. "From Boney's side, it was an open declaration of love all the time. She was shy, never very articulate. But when he talked about her, she was always blushing. They had a very warm, loving equation." Somaaya says Sridevi was not really seeking approval from Boney. "It was a kind of a recheck or a reconfirmation. They both knew what had to be done."

Last year, a few days after the release of her last film *Mom* in July, I was talking to Boney for a feature on her 50 years in the film industry. He was ecstatic. He told me that her success and career were commendable, and that no other actor could have worked across so many languages in so many films. It was out of his love and respect for his wife that he released *Mom*, Sridevi's 300th film, on the same day—July 7—that she had begun her film journey way back in 1967 as a child actor.

As Somaaya mentions, even after an open declaration from Boney's side, their partnership didn't come very easy. In what he called a love-letter to Sridevi, filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma

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FAMILY FIRST: Sridevi and Boney Kapoor with their children Janhvi (right) and Khushi

wrote after her death about the difficult life the actor had. According to him, everyone close to her betrayed her. "In those days actors used to be only paid in mostly black money, and due to fear of tax raids her father used to trust friends and relatives, and every one of them betrayed her the moment her father died. Coupled with this, the ignorant mother made many wrong investments in litigated properties, and all those mistakes combined made her almost penniless by the time Boney came into her life," he wrote. "He himself was in huge debts and all he could afford to give her was a shoulder to cry on." Varma claimed that Boney's mother saw her as a home-breaker and "publicly punched her in the stomach in a five-star hotel lobby for what she did to Boney's first wife, Mona."

But, her close friends say all that is ridiculous talk. Conspiracy theorists worked overtime about her death, gossips 'revealed' her private life, others spoke of cosmetic procedures and of slimming

IN THE EARLY 1980S, SRIDEVI WAS THE HIGHEST PAID FEMALE ACTOR IN THE TAMIL FILM INDUSTRY, CHARGING AROUND ₹3 LAKH PER FILM. A BESOTTED FILM PRODUCER, BONEY KAPOOR, WHO LATER MARRIED HER, REPORTEDLY PAID HER ₹11 LAKH FOR *MR. INDIA*.

pills. "It pains to see someone who guarded her life so well and never reacted to any rumour being ridiculed in her death," says one of her friends.

Pinky Reddy, daughter of film producer T. Subbarami Reddy (co-producer of *Chandni*) and a close friend of Sridevi over the past one decade, says that she has seen the fantastic relationship that the actor shared with her family. "She always used to talk about Boney's children (from Mona). She used to show concern and talk very fondly about them. Even her mother-in-law was broken after losing Sridevi. Why would the mother-in-law feel sad if she was not a good daughter-in-law. She was always a nice person, a dignified woman who stood by her husband and family."

Reddy considered Sridevi to be a perfect human being as her parents knew her since the time she was eight. As a child actor, she had come to their house while working in a movie with Telugu actor ANR (Akkineni Nageswara Rao). Reddy had spoken to her a day before she was to leave for Dubai, for her nephew Mohit Marwah's wedding. "She wasn't feeling very well that day. She had a little fever, but she had promised that after coming back she will be going to Hyderabad to meet my (newly-born) grandson," says Reddy.

Born as Shree Amma Yanger Ayyapan in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu on August 13, 1963, Sridevi started acting at age four, when her father, Ayyapan Yangar, got her a part in the Tamil film *Thunaivan*. Soon she was doing all four south Indian languages at the same time. She entered the Hindi film industry in 1979 in a lead role in the flop *Solva Sawan*, but later had successful films such as *Sadma* and *Himmatwala* (both in 1983). Her biggest challenge was not knowing Hindi, but she made up for it with hard work and did everything to make every role look perfect. She then taught herself Hindi, and by the time she did *Mr. India* (1987), she could do dubbing herself.

"In her early days, I remember, she once had

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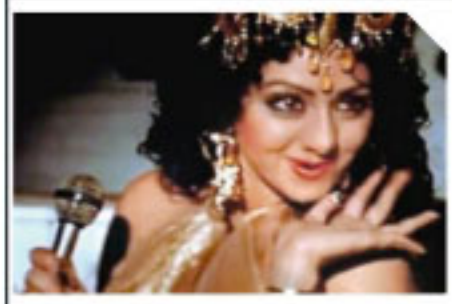
COVER STORY

5 songs Sridevi immortalised

Film: *Nagina* — 1986
Song: 'Main Teri Dushman'
As a shape-shifting serpent dancing to the tunes of a snake charmer, she mesmerised audiences

Film: *Janbaaz* — 1986
Song: 'Har Kisi Ko'
Sridevi swaying in a red sari on the beach overshadowed the film's female lead Dimple Kapadia

Film: *Mr. India* — 1987
Song: 'Kate Nahi Kat Te'
Wearing a blue sari, Sridevi cavorted around her invisible lover, catching the fancy of an entire generation of Indian men



Film: *Mr. India* — 1987
Song: 'Hawa Hawai'
The unforgettable performance, to a song that is still popular today, earned her the popular nickname Ms Hawa Hawai

Film: *Chandni* — 1989
Song: 'Mere Haathon Mein'
A hugely popular wedding song in the 1990s. Her styling and the colourful bangles were a rage

GRAPHICS: SYAM KRISHNAN

SUPER COP K.P.S. GILL IS SAID TO HAVE WATCHED SRIDEVI'S 1983 MOVIE *SADMA* 21 TIMES. HE PLAYED HOST TO HER IN 1993 WHEN SHE WAS SHOOTING IN CHANDIGARH. ANOTHER ARDENT FAN WAS JHARKHAND'S FIRST CHIEF MINISTER BABULAL MARANDI, WHO ONCE RUED THAT HE COULD NO LONGER WATCH SRIDEVI'S MOVIES IN THEATRES OWING TO SECURITY REASONS. "AND I DO NOT LIKE WATCHING HER ON THE IDIOT-BOX," HE SAID.

PTI

to get dressed as a village belle. They had put something on her head and then covered it with a sari. It was called *singoda*. She was so fascinated with the word, she asked, *'Singoda!* What kind of a word is that?' But slowly, she got well-versed with the jokes and references; and started calling people *jee* and *sahab* instead of *sar*. She was very reserved and very polite. At the same time, she was very sharp. She learned things," says Somaaya, who also vouches for the strong gut feeling she possessed. "She knew what a person was all about, and she knew whom she wanted to be friends with. She made her decisions from her heart."

Make-up artist Mickey Contractor says it was great working with her and that she was always considerate and accommodating. "She would usually do her own make-up and she was good at it, but with me, she would allow me to do whatever I wanted. Moreover, she used to be curious and would ask about the colours I used," he says.

Celebrity photographer Dabbo Ratnani first worked with her for *Judaai*. "She was extremely professional and courteous, very respect-

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SRI AND PADMA SHRI Sridevi, receiving the Padma Shri from then president Pranab Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in 2013, (above) a still from *English Vinglish*

ful towards every technician—whether it was a make-up person, hairdresser or a spotboy. It was a delight to work with her, especially because I worked with her since the start of my career. For a newcomer, she showed immense respect and waited for instructions. And that was a beautiful quality," says Ratnani. "The transformation happened once she came in front of the camera—she became a livewire."

She would take time to open up. In his memoir *Khullam Khulla*, actor Rishi Kapoor recalls that during the entire shooting of *Nagina* (1986), Sreedevi and he exchanged just four lines besides the usual daily greetings. By the time they did *Chandni* together, the communication had improved. Actor Rohini Hattangadi, who worked with her in *Chaalbaaz*, doesn't remember having a conversation with her ever. However, what she remembers is her punctuality and sincerity towards work. "She shot one song while she had fever, and she never missed a single beat," says Hattangadi, also recalling how she would come forward to help the co-actors. "I had to wear a funny make-up for the song 'Galti Ho Gayee'. I couldn't do it all. She came to me to ask if she should try, and she gave me a perfect look."

Her reserved nature, says director Satish Kaushik, was her personality. She spoke less and understood more. "But, she was emotional and understood everything. Twenty years after my son's death, I had a daughter Vanshika (in 2012) and madam came with Boney to wish me well on her arrival. She was so happy. She was always a woman of few words, but her gestures spoke a lot. She had got me a painting with Gayatri Mantra inscribed on it. We can't have another person like her," says Kaushik.

Somaaya believes that there were rare, candid moments when she gave herself away. She recalls the time visiting Sridevi in Chennai when she lost her mother, in 1997. She introduced Somaaya to her aunt and then said something in Tamil. Curious, Somaaya asked her what were they talking about. She told her that she had often talked to her aunt about Somaaya—she being short and still looking attractive. "I never knew what she thought about me, but there were such moments when she opened up."

In the last couple of months, everyone I spoke to said that she was excited about her elder daughter Janhvi's debut film *Dhadak* (to release in July). "She beamed with pride when talking about her girls," says Reddy, who thinks that she was more a passionate mother, than she was an actor.

Unfortunately, Sridevi will not be around to see Janhvi's film. Hundreds of fans gathered to pay their respects to the iconic actor who was accorded state funeral. Now, with her gone, everyone is only worried about the family she has left behind—a family that completely relied on her. ♦

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COVER STORY

When Sridevi got beaten up!

BY NEDUMUDI VENU

Beauty and talent are a rare combination. Sridevi had both. I acted as her father in the Malayalam film *Devaraagam*. I had been apprehensive that the star who made it big in Bollywood might show scant regard for a Malayalam actor like me. But she was actually friendly with all of us, and was very humble and shy. Even though she was not fluent in Malayalam, she made an effort to speak to us in Malayalam out of her regard for us. She had great respect for the Malayalam film industry and she loved Kerala and its customs.

The film script demanded that I beat Sridevi in a fit of anger. So I told her in advance that I would beat her in a particular manner. I knew she could get hurt. But, to my surprise, when we went for the shot, my hitting her hard didn't bother her at all, and we completed the scene quickly.

Some years later, I met Sridevi at a Filmfare award night, in Chennai, where I received the lifetime achievement award. She took some time to recognise me, as she had only seen me as an old man in *Devaraagam*. But once she realised who I was, she said in Tamil, *Ennoda appa* [my father], and laughed. Sridevi's passing away is a great loss to the Indian film industry.

Venu is a national award-winning Malayalam actor.

AS TOLD TO ANIRUDHA KARINDALAM

REGIONAL REIGN

Before conquering Bollywood, Sridevi ruled the south film industry with her unparalleled acting prowess

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

Silence greets you as you enter Meenampatti, which is just 4.5km from Sivakasi, the cracker capital of Tamil Nadu. Two printouts of Sridevi's photographs, with a few rose petals strewn around them, rest on a small stone platform in the village square. Meenampatti is mourning the loss of its beloved daughter who went on to become a Bollywood star, leaving behind its bylanes for the Mumbai skyline. "Fifty-four is no age to die. Though it has been decades since the village had seen her, it is an irreparable loss for us," says T. Srinivasan, a distant relative of the actor. "I don't remember her as a child. They were here for a few years till she was six and then the family moved to Chennai." The two photos, one of baby Sridevi and another with her parents as a little girl, remained on the platform till she was cremated in Mumbai.

Sridevi's lawyer father, Ayappan Naidu,

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STARTING YOUNG (Clockwise from left) Sridevi started her career at the age of four; a still from *Sadma*; villagers in Meenampatti pay tribute to Sridevi

hailed from a family of landlords. Her mother, Rajeswari, was from Andhra Pradesh. The house that the family had lived in was in a dilapidated condition for long and was renovated only recently. Srinivasan, who worked for Naidu then, says the family last came to the village in 1989 when the father unsuccessfully contested the assembly elections on a Congress ticket. Another villager Dhanalakshmi recalls how Sridevi had campaigned for her father during the polls. "She is still the village girl 'Mayil' for us," says villager Radha Kumaresan. "I was just 12 when I watched her in Bharathiraja's *16 Vayathinile* (1977). She was so pretty that I always wanted to dress up like her."

In the late 1970s, Tamil cinema was undergoing a change—melodrama was out and realistic cinema was in. The transition was seen in its actors, too. B. Saroja Devi and J. Jayalalithaa had given way to Sridevi and Sripriya. The roles had substance, too. The heroine was no longer mere eye-candy, but was backed by strong scripts. And, Sridevi fit the bill. She was the only actor then who could play a village girl, a college student, a 'modern 80s' girl and even a young woman who suffers from amnesia. No wonder she was a favourite of legendary directors K. Balachander, Bharathiraja, J. Mahendran and Balu Mahendra. In the 1970s and 1980s, Sridevi worked her charm not only in the Tamil film industry but also in the Telugu and Malayalam film industries, before conquering Bollywood. "She was a superstar from the very beginning. Her talents were amazing as a child artiste in *Thunaivan* (1969). She always lived the character," recalls director S.P. Muthuraman, who directed Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan and Sridevi in the 1980s.

In Bharathiraja's *16 Vayathinile*, Sridevi beautifully portrayed the sadness within a village girl yearning for a lavish life, and outperformed her costars Kamal and Rajinikanth. It was this movie that transformed her from a child artiste to a character actor. "She was 13 then," says Bharathiraja. "I wondered how a young actor like her would match the talents of Kamal. But, she matched him in every scene. I knew she would go places. Many male actors refuse to do risky stunts nowadays, but she insisted on doing it. We had a body double ready. But she refused and did her own stunts in the movie. It shows her commitment."

In Balachander's *Varumaiyin Niram Sigappu* (1980), she portrayed the pain—her sad eyes speaking volumes—of being an educated, unemployed woman. Her expressions in songs like 'Sippi irukkuthu muthum irukkuthu' earned her many fans.

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COVER STORY

Balachander's *Moondru Mudichu* (1976), opposite Rajinikanth and Kamal, was a turning point in Sridevi's career. She went on to act in at least 27 films with Kamal and 20 with Rajinikanth. "She was always busy with heavy call sheets [shooting schedule], shuttling between shooting spots, sets and dubbing studios," says Muthuraman, who made *Adutha Varisu* (1983) with Sridevi and Rajinikanth in lead roles. "I used to take long call sheets from her only to make her take rest for at least two days during the shoot." He recalls how Sridevi, during the making of the blockbuster *Priya* (1978), did not turn up for the shoot in a foreign location as she was reluctant to wear a two-piece swimsuit. "So, we got her a full-length swimsuit and convinced her to act," he says.

Sridevi's performance in Mahendran's *Johnny* (1980) and Balu Mahendra's *Moondaram Pirai* (1982) were exemplary. While she played a singer in *Johnny*, she immortalised the role of a young girl suffering from amnesia in *Moondaram Pirai*. It won her the first Tamil Nadu state film award, and was later remade in Hindi—*Sadma* (1983).

Says Bharathiraja, "I can proudly say that I introduced Sridevi to the Hindi film world. It was the Hindi remake of my *16 Vayathinile* [*Solva Sawan* (1979)] that took her to Bollywood. When I initially told her about the remake, she was hesitant to act in the Hindi movie. But, I convinced her. Through her hard work, she rose to rule Bollywood, too. She was an extraordinary talent. She had an inherent talent to grasp things fast. She did not study in any college or university, but she could speak nine languages."

Sridevi was a style icon, too—her pastel saris, bindis, earrings and bangles were a rage among women then. "We all used to envy her those days. She was a very focused actor," says actor Sripriya.

It was not out of sheer luck but talent that Sridevi stood out, says a teary-eyed Kamal in the video released by his office. "She worked hard from her childhood. She shaped herself and learnt every day she worked," he says. "I was astounded by her climb from a childhood artiste to a Bollywood star. She was very fond of me and I, too, was fond of her." Actor Mohan Ram says not everyone can work the way she did. "You perform or act in one film then you become a star now. But, those were the days when hard work alone mattered," he says.

While she was a thorough professional, Sripriya says she was always silent on set. Says Muthuraman, "Whenever I saw her, I felt she always looked depressed, like a person who had lost something in her life. I used to tell her to be more expressive in real life." ◆

WORKING MAGIC

BY SATISH KAUSHIK

Sridevi was at the top of her career, when she gave me—a newcomer—a chance with *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* (1993). I owe my career to her.

I had assisted Shekhar Kapur in *Joshilaay*, and *Mr. India*. As an assistant director, I used to interact with her a lot, telling her about the scenes and the shots. By the time *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* happened, she had enough confidence in me. Besides, my friend Boney Kapoor was the producer. I couldn't have asked for a better start. After I became a director, she married Boney and became a family member.

Working with her was a treat. A director had to explain just the minimum and she would express

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FOOTLOOSE: Sridevi in dance sequence from *Roop Ki Raani Choron Ka Raja*

and enliven the role, creating an unforgettable impact. For *Mr. India*, Shekhar and I had decided that the girl would be a goofball, an absent-minded reporter, who would keep banging into things and saying sorry. Sridevi improvised it so well that it was hilarious on screen. Again, in one of the songs of *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja*, she had to look like a Japanese and I remember her working hard to make her eyes look smaller. I remember telling her not to work so hard, but she insisted and created magic. She always did—in spite of not being well-versed in Hindi—with her timing, her understanding of camera angles and her dance moves, be it 'Hawa Hawai', 'Kate Nahi Kat Te' or 'Dushman Dil Ka Jo Hai Mere'. In fact, in the last one, she had to descend 15 to 20 steps in high heels; and she did, without looking down.

Himmatwala was her first huge hit in Hindi. Even before it was released, Javed (Akhtar) *saab* had spoken about this girl from the south, who he predicted would do really well. The next thing I knew, I was doing *Joshilaay* with her. As a student in 1975, I had watched Julie in Rivoli Cinema, Connaught Place, Delhi, and even though she had a small role in it, I felt she was great.

Sridevi would adapt to whatever the role required, be it a commercial film like *Chandni* and *Chaalbaaz* or character-oriented roles like *Gumrah* or *Mr. India*. No one can forget her Charlie Chaplin act in *Mr. India*. She would fit into any role with ease. She was flexible and calm, and never threw tantrums. In *Malini Iyer*, a TV series I directed (produced by Boney Kapoor), she acted with elan the role of a south Indian bride in a Punjabi family (like Sridevi and Boney Kapoor).

And, then, I saw her slipping into the role of Boney's better half. She, in a blink, left the limelight to be a housewife and a mother, and was good at it. She stayed away from the spotlight to bring her children up. And then, she came back to do *English Vinglish* with the same gusto that she was always known for.

Sridevi was a woman of good judgment. Once we had to shoot a scene with her playing a con-woman. I told her that we would need her in western clothes. She came on the set with a young costume designer and told me that he was really good, and that I should work with him more often. That boy was Manish Malhotra. She could spot talent. It was as spontaneous as her acting.

AS TOLD TO PRIYANKA BHADANI

VIPIN JOSHI

Conservative Sri

BY PRIYADARSHAN

Boney Kapoor is a very close friend of mine who gave me a break in Bollywood with *Virasat*. It was through Boney that I became friends with Sri. I have done six ads with Sri, but never got the chance to do a film with her. The name Sridevi suits Sri. She always looked like a goddess. She had beautiful eyes and smile, and was always conscious of it.

Sri used to tell me that her biggest disappointment was not doing a full-fledged comedy film. She told me, "Priyan, please make a good comedy film for me. I will do it without even reading the script." I asked Sri why she was so desperate to do a comedy film. Apparently, Balu Mahendra, the director of *Moondram Pirai* [which was made in Hindi as *Sadma*], told Sri that her performance in *Moondram Pirai* would fetch her a national award. She made people laugh so much in the film. But it was Kamal Haasan who got the national award for that film. Sri knew that doing comedy would bring the best in her again.

I attended Sri's birthday last year. At the party, Sri told Janhvi [her daughter] in front of me to pull her dress up. I was surprised and asked Sri why she said that. And Sri replied, "Priyan, this generation is ignorant. Modern dress is okay, but one needs to be respectable also." Sri said that in her younger days even she used to wear all kinds of dress. But after she had children, she realised that she was a conservative, as she didn't like her children wearing certain kinds of dress.

Boney and Sri were the best couple that I have ever met. Best because Boney was very mature and Sri was childlike.

The writer is an acclaimed filmmaker.

AS TOLD TO ANIRUDHA KARINDALAM

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PNB SCAM

Clean-up drive

The PNB fraud investigation will go beyond probing the criminal conspiracy

BY NAMRATA BIJI AHUJA

When the CBI started the investigation of the fraud in Punjab National Bank, the agency had no clue about the whereabouts of Nirav Modi, the main suspect in the case. It only knew the diamantaire, who allegedly siphoned off ₹12,700 crore using fraudulent letters of undertaking, left India in January. As a long shot, the investigators sent an email to Modi, asking him to join the probe. Modi replied that he could not do that immediately as he was busy with his businesses outside the country. The CBI has again written to him, asking to immediately contact the Indian mission where he was staying as it was legally mandatory for a suspect to join the investigation when he was asked to. And, a parallel probe is on to find out his exact location.

Meanwhile, the fraud just got bigger. It was initially estimated at ₹11,400 crore, but PNB reported an additional ₹1,300 crore to stock exchanges on February 26. The CBI investigators, who had been camping at the Brady House branch of the bank in Mumbai, were surprised that it remained undetected for a fortnight since the investigation started.

The CBI investigation into the criminal conspiracy behind the scam is just the tip of the iceberg. With Modi, his wife, Ami, brother Nishal and maternal uncle Mehul Choksi (promoter of Gitanjali Group) on the run, the government has launched a multi-agency probe into the empire built by Modi and Choksi. Under the scanner are 114 companies and limited liability partnerships (LLPs) that are linked to the duo. Some of these companies deal with diamonds and jewels, while others are into retail, exports and technology.

"The act of fraud perpetrated on the PNB is on account of misrepresentations and falsehood in the public disclosures about the financial state of affairs of the concerned companies and LLPs, which has jeopardised the financial health of PNB, apart from causing serious damage and financial loss to various stakeholders," said V. Chakranarayan, regional director of corporate affairs ministry, in a petition filed before the National Company Law Tribunal on February 23. This was after PNB wrote to the ministry seeking attachment of the movable and immovable properties of the accused. The Mumbai bench of the NCLT has so far allowed the government to attach 64 properties, including those of Modi and Choksi.

Choksi's lawyer Sanjay Abott, however, said he was not aware of any such move. "'We have not been served any notice by the NCLT, so we are not aware. All I can say is that there has been no financial wrongdoing on the part of my client," he said.

The Enforcement Directorate has provisionally attached 21 immovable properties of the accused under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. These include six residential properties and ten office premises in Mumbai, two flats in Pune, a solar power plant and 135 acres in Karjat and a farmhouse in Alibag. So far, assets worth ₹6,400 have been attached.

The gamut of the probe, however, is even wider. Documents accessed by THE WEEK show that it does not limit itself to finding out contraventions under the Companies Act. The Serious Fraud Investigation Office has been tasked to "lift the corporate veil and identify the real face in the financial rotation and diversion of funds; identify the chain of companies, entities and persons involved in the gamut of rotation of funds; ascertain the role of auditors, key managerial persons or independent directors or any other person in the alleged fraud and also investigate the role of entities used as conduit in the alleged fraud."

The corporate affairs ministry has also petitioned the NCLT to direct the

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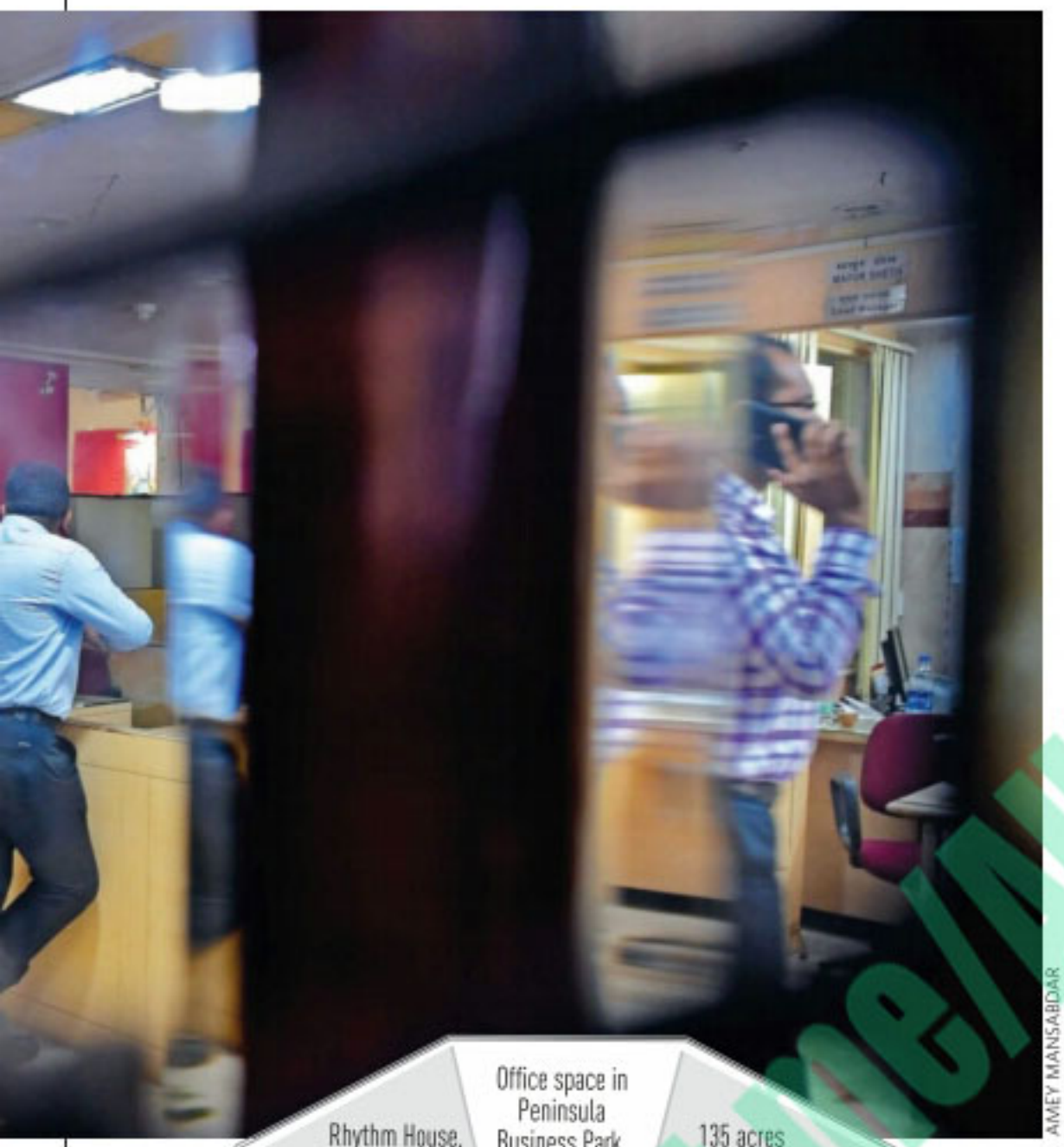
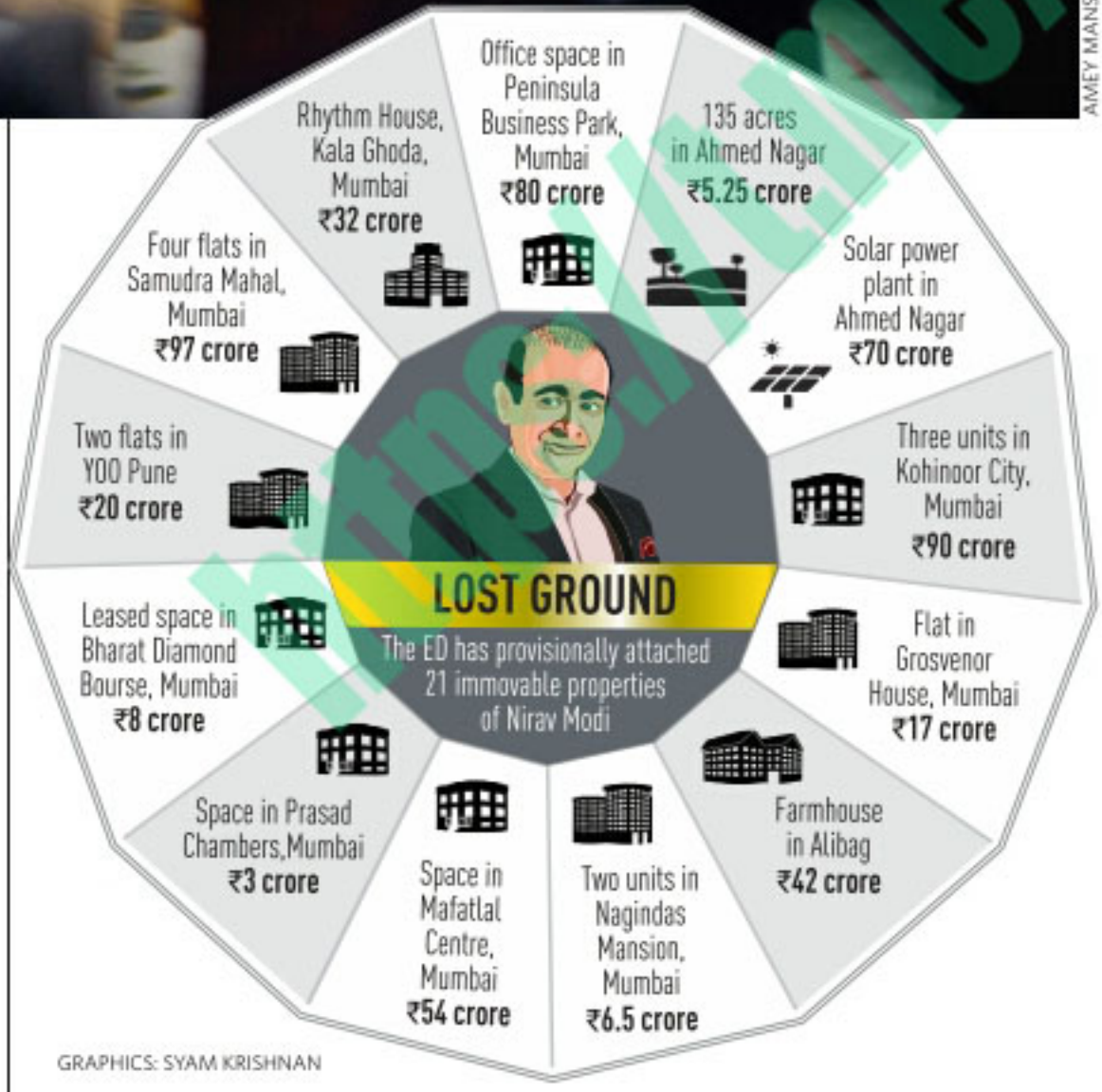


AMEY MANSABDAR

Clearing the mess: CBI officials at Punjab National Bank's Brady House branch in Mumbai


Office space in Peninsula Business Park, Mumbai ₹80 crore
Rhythm House, Kala Ghoda, Mumbai ₹32 crore
135 acres in Ahmed Nagar ₹5.25 crore
Four flats in Samudra Mahal, Mumbai ₹97 crore
Solar power plant in Ahmed Nagar ₹70 crore
Two flats in YOO Pune ₹20 crore
Three units in Kohinoor City, Mumbai ₹90 crore
LOST GROUND
The ED has provisionally attached 21 immovable properties of Nirav Modi
Leased space in Bharat Diamond Bourse, Mumbai ₹8 crore
Flat in Grosvenor House, Mumbai ₹17 crore
Space in Prasad Chambers, Mumbai ₹3 crore
Space in Mafatlal Centre, Mumbai ₹54 crore
Two units in Nagindas Mansion, Mumbai ₹6.5 crore
Farmhouse in Alibag ₹42 crore

GRAPHICS: SYAM KRISHNAN

accused to disclose their movable and immovable assets in other countries for direct attachment under orders issued through Indian missions.

The financial crackdown entails roping in the Central Board of Direct Taxes and the Central Board of Excise and Customs to disclose the list of all assets of the accused for "attachment and restraint on alienation" and asking the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association to disclose details of bank accounts and lockers owned by the accused. All state governments have also been asked to identify and disclose details of immovable properties owned or held by the accused.

PNB has conceded to the CBI that there were several discrepancies in the letters of undertaking issued to the firms of Modi and Choksi. The CBI has questioned Sunil Mehta, the bank's chairman and managing director, and Brahmaji Rao, executive director. On February 27, the agency examined Usha Ananthasubramanian, managing director and CEO of Allahabad Bank. She was the executive director of PNB from July 2011 to November 2013 and the managing director and CEO from August 2015 to May 2017.

On February 28, the CBI arrested M.K. Sharma, an internal chief auditor of PNB. He was responsible for auditing the systems and practices at the Brady House branch and reporting the deficiencies to the zonal office. Earlier the CBI had arrested Rajesh Jindal, a general manager. He was in charge of the branch earlier.

The CBI so far has arrested 13 people associated with PNB and the companies of Modi and Choksi. Sources said the agency adopted a bottom-to-top approach in its investigation as it wanted to prove the criminality in the issuance of LoUs. Apparently, the LoUs were issued without making any entry in the trade finance mod-

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PNB SCAM

ule of the bank's core banking system. A key element of the CBI probe is establishing a quid pro quo.

"The CBI's focus in the ongoing investigation in the serious bank fraud cases is to uncover the criminal conspiracy which caused individuals to defraud the banks of thousands of crores of rupees. CBI Director Alok Kumar Verma has directed the officers to carry out a comprehensive investigation to unearth all aspects of the scam and to take action against all those who are found to be involved," said Abhishek Dayal, spokesperson for the CBI.

A 13-member core team of the agency, headed by a deputy inspector general, is investigating the scam. The CBI has roped in forensic experts, auditors and computer experts to assist them to manoeuvre through the maze of numbers and procedures that duped the entire banking system of the country and multiple financial regulators.

The effort, however, has its limitations. "The CBI's poor record in getting the extradition of an economic offender is because we don't have a law for the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty signed with other countries," said N.R. Wasan, former director general of Bureau of Police Research and Development. "We go through a tedious process of sending the MLAT request through the courts and diplomatic channels. When I was in BPR&D, we had drafted the Mutual Legal Assistance Act in Criminal Matters which would have provided legal sanctity to such pacts. But it has not seen the light of the day."

For now, the CBI has issued an Interpol diffusion notice against Modi, Choksi and others. It is the fastest system of alerting Indian mission if they try to leave one country or enter another, but there has been no word from the Interpol yet. "They could be either using fake passports to travel or staying in one place only," said an officer. "The latter is more likely." Finding that place is the first challenge before the investigators.

Course correction

The Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill is more punitive than preventive

BY SOUMIK DEY

Arun Jaitley, predictably, is vexed by the lack of ethics among some businessmen. And, the finance minister wants to teach those who have siphoned off millions of rupees from banks a lesson or two. "It is in the capacity of the state to chase these people to recover what is rightly due to our taxpayers, those who vested immense trust on the Indian banking system," he said, addressing a gathering of development banking professionals from South Asian countries on February 20. It was his first response on the fraud at Punjab National Bank, which broke about a week earlier.

While many people thought Jaitley's response was too little, too late, it seems he has other plans. In the second session of discussions on budget, which starts on March 6, the finance ministry is likely to introduce the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill in Parliament.

The bill, which empowers the government to attach properties of eco-

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PTI

Bad apples: A protest against the government in Mumbai

While the government wants to project the bill as a cure for many maladies, experts have already pointed out many holes in the draft.

nomic offenders and defaulters who have fled India, was originally drafted by the ministry when industrialist Vijay Mallya fled to Britain in March 2016 after defaulting on the repayment of loans worth ₹9,000 crore to his Kingfisher Airlines. It had embarrassed the government, as Mallya left just after attending a Rajya Sabha session (he was a member) and using his diplomatic passport, despite a lookout notice from the CBI.

By September 2016, a draft cabinet note on the bill was cleared by the ministry of law and social justice, with one suggestion. "We were told to introduce a saving clause in the bill, which can provide certain exceptions to the statute," said Subhash Garg, secretary at the Department of Economic Affairs, which has readied the final draft of the bill. "The amendments suggested were made and we want to introduce it with immediate effect."

Till recently the bill was low on priority, but it got a boost after diamond merchants Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi fled India after swindling banks. This would help blunt the attack of the opposition parties when Parliament reconvenes. "The bill is ready and has been moved up in the order of bills to be introduced to Parliament," said an official spokesperson for the finance ministry.

The draft bill defines a fugitive economic offender as a person who has an arrest warrant issued in respect of a scheduled offence and who leaves or has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution. It covers a wide range of offences, including wilful loan defaults, cheating and forgery, forged or fraudulent document of electronic records, duty evasion and non-repayment of deposits.

While the government wants to project the bill as a cure for many maladies, experts have already pointed out many holes in the draft. For one, the bill suggests to take action only if an offender has already fled and refuses to return to India on or after the date the bill is made a law, and it covers offences involving more than ₹100 crore. "This is not a deterrent but a postmortem provision of law," said Ricky Chopra, corporate and immigration lawyer. "The point is to stop these offenders from becoming fugitives, not just classifying them for legal action."

Currently, there are provisions to try fugitive economic offenders as per three corporate laws—Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act; Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act; and the more recent Insolvency and Banking Code, 2017. "The cases could also be tried under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and, in fact, the proposed law also suggests to use most terms and provisions of the PML Act," said Chopra.

Complaints under the new law would be registered by the Financial Intelligence Unit, an arm of the finance ministry. The application declaring a person a fugitive economic offender will be issued by this unit. The onus is on the government to provide proof against such an offender. The Enforcement Directorate also will take up investigations under the PML Act against such offenders.

But then again, as in the PNB scam, the recovered assets might not match the size of the fraud. Experts say the jewellery and gems seized from Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi were overvalued by authorities. "In China and other countries, economic offenders are restricted by law from buying even air or bus tickets," said Rathnakar Salian, associate vice president (corporate law), Godrej Industries. "The government must have a strong law to avoid a Nirav Modi or Vijay Mallya-like situation. Just selling attached assets of fugitives, who have no intention of returning the money, may not be the most effective deterrent."

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KERALA

Killings kill the fun

Two gruesome murders overshadow the hugely successful state party conference of the CPI(M)

BY CITHARA PAUL

All isn't well: CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechuri, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and state CPI(M) secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan at the state party conference

On February 25, the Communist Party of China cleared the decks for President Xi Jinping to stay in office forever, by proposing to remove presidential term limits from the constitution. The CPC also proposed to insert "Xi Jinping Thought" into the constitution. The twin moves are deemed to be the CPC's "magical key" to help Chinese society overcome hardships and complete its various missions.

Interestingly, on the same day, the ruling CPI(M) concluded its four-day state conference in Kerala and gave state secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan one more term at the helm. At the conference held in Thrissur, the CPI(M) sidelined traditional jargons like "class war" and "neo-liberal agenda", and spoke about preserving the greenery of Kerala, the rights of transgenders, houses for all, a people-friendly health delivery system, and the importance of public education, palliative care, organic farming, water conservation and waste management.

"Local committees would construct 2,000 houses for destitute families with public support," said Balakrishnan. "The party's district committees would clean up rivers, while local committees would clean up local ponds." Under the watchful eyes of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the Kerala CPI(M) seems to have chucked the distant dream of "revolution" for something more pragmatic and palpable.

Not everyone is happy, though. Critics said the CPI(M) was increasingly looking like an NGO or a religious body. "Charitable activities and palliative care are normally taken up by religious organisations. These should not be the activities of a political party," said BJP leader T.G. Mohandas. Some felt that the statement issued by the party after the state conference read like a press release of the State Planning Board. "Preserving rivers is the duty of the government. How can it be the task of the party?" asked a critic.

The conference, however, could be a turning point in the history of the CPI(M) as it witnessed the end of factionalism in the state unit, which had been plaguing the party for decades. The Kerala CPI(M) is now under the firm grip of Vijayan. It is his line of thought—just like that of Xi in China—which is going to steer the party in the days to come.

Vijayan, who led the state unit of the party for 17 years through some of its worst phases of factionalism before becoming chief minister, has ensured that there is no one to challenge him. "The mandate given to Vijayan by the party when he became the state secretary was to end factionalism. He achieved that," said a state committee member. "Now, the task before him is to showcase the Left government

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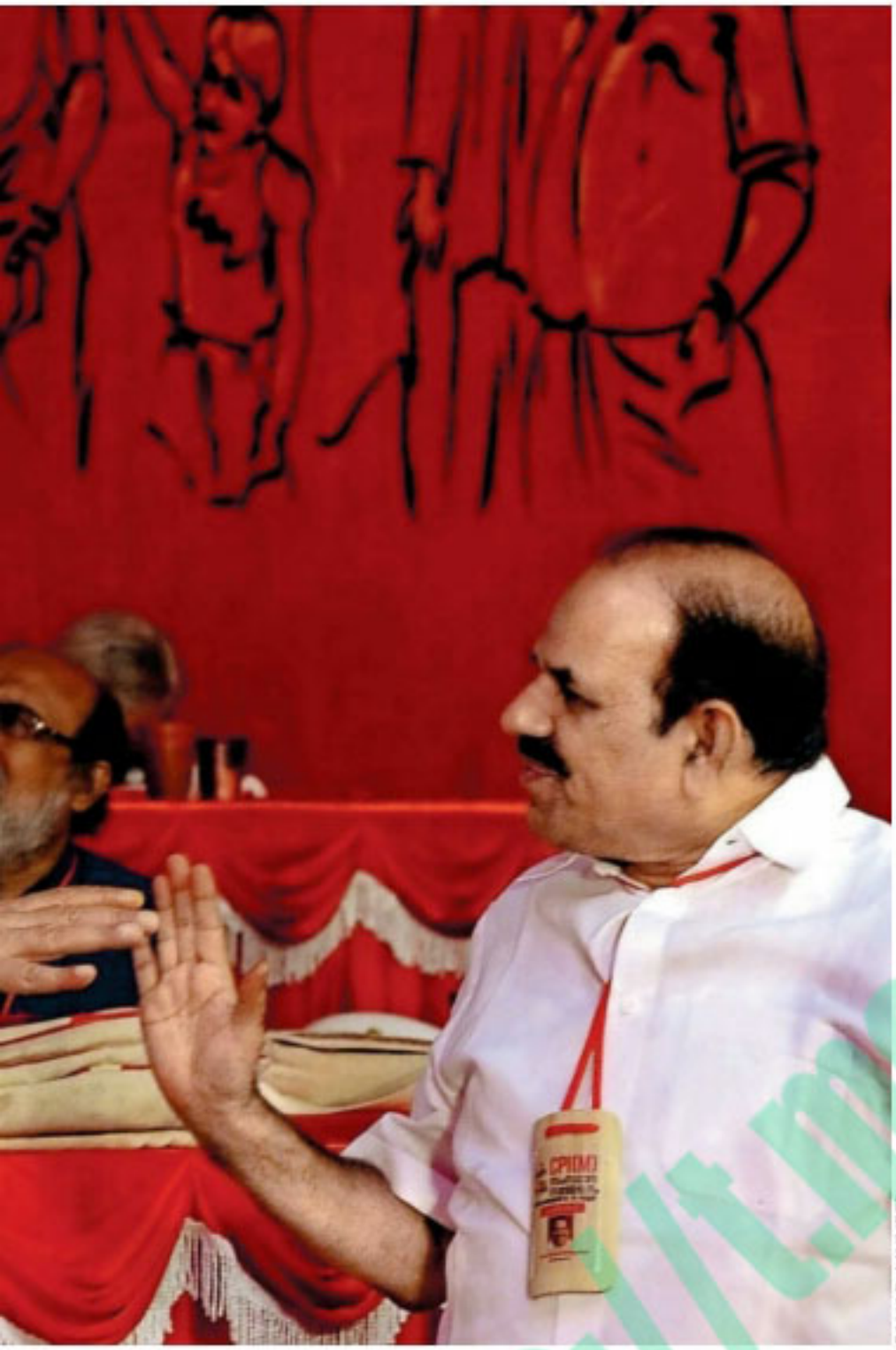

FAHAD MUNEER

in Kerala as a model for the whole country. Vijayan will achieve that, too," he said.

The conference reiterated the state unit's position that there should not be any truck with the Congress in the coming general elections, although it went against the position adopted by the party's general secretary Sitaram Yechury, who favoured a more flexible tactical line. Even junior members questioned Yechury's position, making it clear that retaining power in Kerala is far more important for the state unit than the party's national compulsions. A central committee member said the prevailing unity in the state unit would give it an upper hand in all spheres.

Two gruesome murders have, however, put the CPI(M) and the government on the defensive and took the shine off the state conference. On February 12, M. Shuhaib, a 30-year-old Youth Congress worker from Kannur, was hacked to death, allegedly by CPI(M) activists. Five CPI(M) workers have been arrested and photographs have come out showing some of the accused with senior leaders, including Vijayan. The Congress has launched a strong protest against the murder and has stalled the ongoing assembly session, demanding a CBI probe. On February 27, hearing a petition filed by Shuhaib's parents requesting a CBI investigation, the Kerala High Court, too, came down heavily on the government for the delay in the probe. "The CPI(M), regardless of its good work, will not gain majority support unless it unequivocally rejects murder as a political tool," said Ashitha R., a human rights activist.

> ***Even among party activists, there is concern that the CPI(M) is deviating from its ideological core, and all that matters is victory in the next elections.***

The mob lynching of Madhu, a mentally challenged tribal youth from Attappadi in Palakkad district, for allegedly stealing a small bag of rice, has put a question mark on the much hyped Kerala model of development. Some of the attackers took selfies with Madhu, even as the 27-year-old was being beaten up, with his hands tied with his own clothes. Madhu was killed on February 22, when the CPI(M) state conference was going on. Online and offline protests against the murder overshadowed the conference, and left the Vijayan government with a lot to explain.

Even among party activists, there is concern that the CPI(M) is deviating from its ideological core, and all that matters is victory in the next elections. "Power has become more important than ideology," lamented an activist. But these criticisms do not seem to worry party bosses.

A central committee member said it was easy to blame the CPI(M) for not being revolutionary enough. "The party is trying to adapt and survive in a society like Kerala, which has high aspirational levels," said the member. "It is, however, important for everyone that a Left government remains a referral point for the entire country with its good work." ◆

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THIS WEEK, MEET...

SOURAV GANGULY, FORMER CAPTAIN, INDIAN CRICKET TEAM

I regret the act at Lord's

BY BARKHA DUTT

Former Indian captain Sourav Ganguly's cricketing career saw dramatic twists and turns. Ganguly writes about those emotional moments in his book *A Century Is Not Enough*. Co-authored by Gautam Bhattacharya, the book is published by Juggernaut.
Edited excerpts from an exclusive interview:

The reason this book [*A Century Is Not Enough*] is so interesting is that it is about your life as a cricketer, but it is also about anybody's mental struggle in any profession. Was it difficult to share, given how we want our heroes to be invincible?
No, I think it's a picture of what happens at the top level. It's a world where even if you're playing well, you are still on the edge because you want to remain successful. So, that circle doesn't stop. The circle of being nervous, having a good day and then going back to a bad day. It's an emotional journey whether you are the best or whether you are the worst. I have seen the greatest closely. I have seen Sachin [Tendulkar] in his prime. And, I will tell you a story in Australia. He was just an 18-year-old kid and I was about 18 as well, and we were sharing a room in 1991, before the Sydney Test match. I was not playing. So, I was not nervous and I had gone to bed [at] about 10 o' clock. I woke up suddenly at 2 o' clock and saw all the lights switched on in the room. So, I looked at Sachin and I saw him walking up and down in the room. He said, 'I can't sleep, my adrenaline is pumping. It's pumping so much and I want to go and get some runs. I haven't played well at Melbourne in the second Test match.' And, then he went on to get a hundred in Sydney. So, the journey of a successful person is an emotional turbulence, even when you are at the top.

But, you are more emotional than most people.
I am. But I think there are lots others as well. Some show it, some don't show it. You look at young Virat Kohli on the cricket field.

Virender Sehwag just said that Virat Kohli reminds him of you.
(Laughs.) An upgraded version.

Did you ever regret any moment of your professional life?
Yes, I did. Waving the shirt at Lord's!

But, it is the most iconic, popular culture memory of you.
Everybody says that. But, I wouldn't do it again. My daughter sees it now and said, 'Why did you do that?' I said, because I was happy that we won. But, I come from a very conservative shy Bengali family. And, it happened in the heat of the moment. Off the field I was a completely different person.

Why do you regret taking that T-shirt off? It was your payback to Andrew Flintoff; he had done the same thing to mock the Indian side.
I regret it because there are better ways to show happiness at beating England at Lord's. I am not the sort of a person to take my shirt off and get agitated. I am normally a very docile person. But the cricket field somehow turned me differently. Everybody tells me that's one of the most defining moments. But, I keep telling them, I wish I had not done that.

Because it doesn't define you.
Yes. It is not who I am.

Did your daughter think it was uncool?
Yes, she said, you shouldn't have done that. She is brought up in a convent school and children of convent school are slightly different. She said, 'That didn't look good on TV'. I said, 'Yeah, I also feel the same, but, don't worry about it. You were not even born when I did that.'

Greg Chappell remains a bad memory. You call it the darkest chapter of your cricketing life. And, you say, you conquered the country with the Australia series, but you could not conquer one of its citizens.
Could not understand one of its citizens.

Do you, today, understand what

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I DID NOT GET TO SIT ACROSS A TABLE AND ASK [GREG] CHAPPELL, 'WHAT WAS MY MISTAKE?'

PTI

SOURAV GANGULY

Affectionately called Dada, Sourav Ganguly is regarded as one of the most successful captains in Indian cricket. The stylish and prolific batsman earned the nickname 'God on the Offside'. Currently, he is the president of Cricket Association of Bengal and a member of the governing council of the Indian Premier League.

Chappell had against you?
No. I still don't understand. I never asked him. I did not get to sit across a table and ask Chappell, 'What was my mistake?'

What was he judging you on?
For him, it became personal, that it's either me or him. That should not happen on a cricket field. Yes, you can feel somebody is not a good player. But, there are ways of doing it. It happened in my time when I was captain. I could only pick eleven. And I had to leave another 25 out. But, you should be human enough or professional enough to talk to the other person. When that conversation doesn't exist in a competitive world, that's where the problem starts.

It's quite ironic that [recently] you had a voice in who will be the next coach. But that also came against the backdrop of simmering tensions between Virat Kohli and Anil Kumble. Life came full circle. Did you see that it was poetic justice of some kind?
Yes. As I was going through that incident and I was trying to solve it—trying to get Anil and Virat together because both are excellent cricketers and both have done so much for the country—I thought, 'Oh God, I don't want this to happen again.' You know, get together, sort it out.

It reminded you of your time with Chappell?
Yes, and let the game go on. The only difference was the casualty that time was a captain, and the casualty this time was a coach. So, that was a major difference, but I am actually so fond of both individuals. And I have known Anil so closely. And, there is not a bad bone in his body. Yes, he is intense, he wants to win, he is aggressive when he bowls; you could see it on his face, that's the personality. But, that doesn't mean he is a bad person. And, I thought, together they could be a fantastic partnership. The team is still doing well; the way they played one-day cricket in South Africa was remarkable. But, even with Anil, it could have been remarkable.

Did you try and make peace between Virat and Anil?
We did. We tried. We went to Virat and said, 'Do something, sort it out and move on because I think he will be helpful, he is a good man, he doesn't have a bad bone in his body.' I think some miscommunication happened somewhere. And, Virat is a great person, too. I don't meet him much but when I see him on TV and what he does in life, you see that there is a heart somewhere.

In the book you don't tell us how you felt about Shah Rukh [Khan] taking the decision to drop you [from the Kolkata Knight Riders team]?
As I said, it is pretty acceptable. Even for him, if he doesn't give a hit, I am sure the producer would look for somebody else for the next film. And, I said he can produce his own films; we can't, because we have to get selected by someone.

But, you were not such a fan of the IPL auctions being a measure of the cricketer's worth?
The IPL auction is not a reflection of how good the cricketer is. Because, a lot of it is on supply and demand. I have seen franchise owners panic on the table. ◆

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INTERVIEW

Vikram Limaye, managing director and CEO, NSE

We are working with SEBI on shell companies

AMEY MANSABDAR

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

Vikram Limaye is a man on a mission. He took charge as managing director and chief executive of the National Stock Exchange at a time it was under regulatory scrutiny over allegations that some brokers got preferential access to its servers. With the ball now in the SEBI's court, Limaye is looking ahead to strengthen his relations with the government, investors and shareholders. In an exclusive interview, he talks about the planned initial public offering, how the exchange is embracing new technology, and its ambitions to become more global through the international exchange it has set up in GIFT City in Gujarat. Excerpts:

When you moved to the NSE, what were the matters that required your immediate attention?

One was certainly to sort out some of the regulatory issues that are still in the process of being sorted out. The IPO was also an important event, but the IPO plans are contingent on sorting out those regulatory issues. Second was to ensure that all the stakeholder relationships are brought to the level where they ought to be. By stakeholder relationships, I mean all of them; whether it is the government, regulators, the media, clients, shareholders, employees... all stakeholder relationships required improvements.

Third, from an organisation perspective, is strengthening controls and processes. I have a laundry list of what needs to be done. Obviously, there are several business-related things to be done. Market development is priority. The core of the NSE's mandate is to do what is right for investors and markets. And, while the equity markets are relatively well developed, they still have a long way to go. So, new products, making sure you deepen the markets, get more retail participation and better intermediation of savings into markets. New market development is important. So, bond markets need to develop. It's my hope that exchanges will soon be

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allowed to participate in all asset classes.

There was record fundraising from the IPO market in 2017. Are we seeing a revival?

I would say it's still the first stage of capital raising. Capital raising activity has picked up only in the past 12 months or less. And, if you look at the composition of that, particularly at the large companies who have raised capital, almost 70 per cent has been from the financial services sector. So, it hasn't actually been broad-based. Again, a large percentage of that has been selling shareholders, rather than money being raised for capex or growth. I do feel that as growth picks up, as capacity utilisation picks up going forward, there will be more capital raising and there will be more balanced capital raising activity across sectors. And, also, a more balanced mix between private equity investors selling or shareholders selling versus money being raised for capex or investments. That's as far as the main listings are concerned.

As far as the SMEs are concerned, it [capital raising] has largely been for growth capital, and it has in fact been diversified. So, 50 per cent has been manufacturing related, another 15-20 per cent has been services related, and another 15-20 per cent has been IT related. Within manufacturing, too, it has been a whole host of sectors. So, there you find a more diversified mix and money that is being raised for growth capital.

NSE launched an international exchange at the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City. What are your long-term plans there?

IFSC [International Financial Services Centre] is certainly an important initiative for us. It is not easy to build a new exchange. It is important to build liquidity, and that requires a lot of work. From a liquidity enhancement standpoint, we launched a liquidity enhancement scheme in November. Liquidity has built up post that. We crossed $100 million and exceeded BSE. But, beyond that, both exchanges put together, the volumes are not where they need to be. We are working hard with FIIs [foreign institutional investors], and with the traders to build liquidity. But, building liquidity takes time.

There are a few other things that need to be done to put our GIFT City on par with other international jurisdictions, whether its Dubai or Singapore in terms of ease of doing business as well as transaction costs and some tax aspects. So, we are working with SEBI and the government to see how we can get that going.

Then, my hope is that, as we build liquidity through this liquidity enhancement scheme, liquidity is sticky and it doesn't disappear once the scheme is withdrawn. At this point, we are just encouraging players to come in and trade on GIFT. We will see how it evolves. But, it is an important thing for everybody; important for the government, and for the exchanges and participants, because there are unique aspects to that, in terms of being able to trade dollar contracts, there is obviously no STT [securities transactions tax].

We have also launched some global stocks in GIFT city—15 stocks such as Apple, Google, the larger companies, those are also available for trading. Domestic investors, through the $2,50,000 facility that is available, are also able to trade in GIFT City. But, that will only happen once the cash market starts operating in GIFT City, for which the depositories have to set up offices there. They are permitted to set up branches. So my hope is, in a couple of months they will have their office up and running, and then, even the cash market will be permitted. Right now, it's mainly the derivatives market.

The government and SEBI have begun cracking down on shell companies. What role are exchanges going to play on this front?

I would not want to get into details of that, because there are sensitivities surrounding. We are working with SEBI very closely on whatever needs to be done in terms of reviewing these companies that have been identified, and we are providing whatever reports and investigations required. Then, based on what the findings are, I am sure SEBI and the government will do whatever need be.

Despite SEBI relaxing norms a while ago, we haven't seen any IPOs from startups.

Part of it has to do with the domestic investment environment, which has become a lot more robust only in the past 18 months. If you look at the flows into mutual funds, they have really grown in the past 18 months. So, now you have the domestic mutual fund landscape which is much stronger than what it was 18 to 24 months ago. Therefore, the ability to support startups and emerging companies is very different from what it was 18 to 24 months ago. The domestic pool of capital is much larger now. Therefore, the volatility or dependence on foreign investors is much lower. Earlier, when FIIs pulled out $400 to $500 million, the currency and markets would go for a toss. It does not happen anymore. That is one.

Secondly, we are doing our bit in terms of educating the startup and technology landscape in terms of the benefits of a domestic listing and trying to sort out some of the myths that they had in terms of the difficulty of listing. SEBI has created three different platforms and three different criteria for listings. The tech listing criteria are different from the SME listing criteria and are different from the main board listing criteria. They are obviously much more lenient for technology companies, because the nature of the company is different. You can't hold on to three years profitability, and so much net worth. So, they are much easier to comply with. From that perspective, my hope is that you will see more domestic listings of technology companies. ◆

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TRADE

Taming the dragon

Budget boosts India's efforts to reduce the trade deficit with China

BY SOUMIK DEY

Despite a bitter territory dispute and occasional displays of aggression, India and China have not fired a single bullet on the border in the past four decades. The dragon, however, has unleashed a trade war on India, and it is stifling Indian enterprises and businesses. Be it for electronics, heavy engineering goods or chemicals, India has been increasingly relying on imports from China. But, India's exports to China have remained limited to minerals and foodgrains. According to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, in 2004-05, India had a trade deficit of about $1.48 billion with China at the dollar-rupee rate prevalent in 2006. This has gone up almost 40 times, to $52.7 billion, in the past 12 years.

While India's imports from China went up steeply, Indian exports to China actually came down—from $14.8 billion four years ago to around $10 billion in the last fiscal. "We have been observing that China is creating conditions to restrict Indian exports by creating non-trade barriers," said Sachin Chaturvedi, director general of the Delhi-based think tank Research and Information System for Developing Countries. "The trade deficit with China alone now comprises almost half of India's overall trade deficit."

Chaturvedi's concern finds resonance with the experience of Indian businessmen wanting to do business with China. Karan Chanana, chairman of the basmati exporter Amira Nature Foods, had to work for two years to get all clearances to export rice to China. "The regular inspection visits are a must to initiate any order from Chinese buyers. This is unlike our buyers in Europe and the Middle East, who would rarely visit our facilities," said Chanana.

China had put restrictions on basmati import from India. But a year ago, after prolonged negotiations, it cleared 14 Indian exporters. "The clearances came after a year-and-a-half wait and after sponsoring visits of Chinese authorities for plant inspection," said Chanana. He said it was not easy to get the phytosanitary certification, and the different tax rate structures at various ports in China and non-availability of tax rules in English caused confusion. "Our quality certifications that qualify us to export to 70 countries do not qualify for exports to China," he said.

The ministry of commerce stood by Indian exporters and intervened with Beijing to speed up clearances. "India had been exporting a few thousand tonnes of basmati rice to China via Hong Kong earlier. Those consignments had never faced such problems," said Rajen Sunderesan, executive director of All India Rice Exporters' Association. The AIREA has requested the commerce ministry to take steps to start export of non-basmati rice, which is likely to find a better market as it suits the Chinese palate better. Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu has been supporting discussions with Chinese authorities to allow non-basmati rice export from India.

India has taken note of the difficulties faced by traders in doing business with China, and it is not shying away from tough measures.

India has taken note of the difficulties faced by traders in doing business with China, and it is not shying away from tough measures. Last year, the Director General of Foreign Trade invoked many trade restrictions on Chinese goods on various grounds. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, when she was in charge of the commerce ministry, slapped anti-dumping duties on 93 Chinese items, such as chemicals, machinery, rubber, plastic and electronic goods. "We are analysing trade numbers and entry points for more than 47 items. These findings would be completed by the Directorate of Anti-dumping & Allied Duties. After which a decision on duties would be taken," said commerce secretary Rita Teotia. The government has also engaged with Chinese trade bodies and offered them region-specific trade zones in India.

The Union budget, too, had a few surprises to counter China's trade offensives. Many imports from China have seen an increase in customs duty—silica used for telecom and optic fibre cables (up from 0 per cent to 5 per cent), printed circuit boards used in mobile phone chargers (up from 0 per cent to 10 per cent), assembly panel for LCD and LED televisions (up from 0 per cent to 10

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IN FOCUS

India's first 3T Intraoperative iMRI at Yashoda Hospitals in Hyderabad

Senior neurosurgeons of Yashoda Hospitals, Dr B.J. Rajesh, Dr Venu Gopal, Dr Ananad Balasubramaniam with 3T intraoperative MRI in India at Yashoda Hospitals in Secunderabad

Hyderabad, February 21, 2018: A revolution in brain surgeries has begun in India. The Yashoda Hospitals Group has installed India's first 3T Intraoperative MRI, which has made brain surgeries unprecedentedly accurate, safe and avoids the need for multiple resurgeries recently. This most advanced iMRI helps to change the way current brain tumour surgery is performed and is an important support for CNS tumour treatment. Furthermore, the ability of MRI to successfully couple with functional imaging (perfusion and DTI fibre track imaging) neuroendoscopy and therapeutic devices, such as focused ultrasound, improves brain tumour therapy and outcomes. Taking advantage of iMRI facility, surgeons at Yashoda Group of Hospitals have completed 100 complicated brain surgeries during the last couple of months.

Neurosurgery has always been feared for risks involved to life and function of body parts as the brain controls the whole body. Microscopes in neurosurgery makes it safer and effective to do delicate surgeries on the minute brain structures. However, watching under a microscope, a surgeon only visualises a part of the brain and to plan and reach deep structures was difficult and filled with risks.

"We at Yashoda Hospitals give the highest priority to acquire latest, state of the art technology which can give patients faster, longlasting relief from their ailments. Our surgeons who have trained and have worked with prestigious international and national medical centres are making the best use of these facilities to give best of the best results to patients," said Dr G. S. Rao, Managing Director, Yashoda Group of Hospitals.

For further information, please contact Raju/Sampath on 99592 88894 / 78930 53355

IN FOCUS, KIIT & KISS

Student-centric culture

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), deemed to be university, Bhubaneswar, despite being a young institution, has earned its place as a leading university in India. With a diverse student body of 27,000 representing all states of India and 50 foreign countries, it is on its way to become an international hub for quality professional education. However, apart from high brand value, what distinguishes KIIT is its student-centric culture, which has been enabling its students to achieve big.

Students draw motivation from the life of sacrifice and dedication to humanity of Prof. Achyuta Samanta, who converted his childhood struggle and hardship into his strength, and singlehandedly established KIIT and Kalinga Institute of Social Science (KISS), a free residential institute for 37,000 (including 10,000 alumni) tribal students. Students see him as a role model, drawing happiness and imbibing the values of ethical conduct, morality and compassion.

Students of KIIT and KISS get unmatched exposure by attending and interacting with eminent academicians, legal luminaries, corporate leaders, policy makers and scientists, who come to attend numerous academic conferences, seminars and workshops organised round the year.

Focus on holistic personality development of its students; enabling infrastructure and ambience that nurture excellence have made KIIT students high achievers in academics, campus placements and beyond. For 14 consecutive years, it has been recording cent percent placement which is a record in itself. With 70 top-notch companies doling out about 2,200 job offers for a batch size of 3,000 eligible B.Tech students of 2018 graduating batch, KIIT deemed to be university looks well poised to achieve cent percent campus placement for yet another year.

It also excels in academic placements of its desirous and meritorious students. KIIT's degree has become a passport for the students to get admission in top notch US, UK, Australian and European Universities. Besides high achievers in academics, who bag coveted jobs through campus placement, KIIT has produced IAS toppers, successful entrepreneurs, Olympians, Chess Grand Masters, actors and even beauty queens. ●

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per cent), tyres (up from 10 per cent to 15 per cent), footwear (up from 10 per cent to 20 per cent), and parts and accessories of mobile phones (up from 7.5 per cent to 15 per cent).

The budget also gave bigger allocations to neighbouring countries where China has been trying to gain supremacy through trade deals. Bhutan was granted ₹2,650 crore, Nepal ₹650 crore, Seychelles ₹300 crore, and Myanmar ₹280 crore.

Prabhu has taken a keen interest in boosting exports, and is trying to open trade routes for a number of items from India. "It is understandable that our entrepreneurs are looking to explore newer markets. From the ministry we are constantly engaging at every opportunity with Chinese authorities and soon you will see many positive developments. You will be surprised to know that it was on our insistence that consent for several industry working groups had been received after the economic ministers' meeting at the East Asia Summit in Manila," he said.

During the summit held last September, Prabhu met Chinese commerce minister Zhing Shang to discuss bilateral trade. Zhing had shown interest in discussing anti-dumping investigations on Chinese imports. The ministers agreed to revive the Joint Economic Group.

The thaw in India-China relations after the 73-day Doklam standoff in August has also led to the renewed business interest. Chinese investments in Indian startups are on the rise. India's pharma sector is also looking attractive to Chinese investors. "Chinese investments in India have lately been all small ticket, be it in electronics or for the internet-led business models. But there is a definite traction in the pharma sector because of the rich research that Indian companies hold," said Rajesh Kumar Singh, chief economist, Raymond Group. He said India was crucial to China's business success. "They may say officially that India is a very small concern for Chinese trade interests, but that outlook is changing very fast among the Chinese business community and within the government setup."

But, do not expect things to change fast. "China remains sour on our recent restrictions on their exports and in the recent months I have not seen any expression of interest taking place for large projects between any Indian PSUs and Chinese firms. This will not change in near future," said Aravind Yelery, assistant director of Institute of China Studies in Delhi. He said China would turn more protective towards its producers if the current slowdown continued. "Domestic producers will get special protection and subsidies from the government," he said. "In this increased competition, for India, it will be hard to maintain our existence in China's markets." ◆

The Chinese dominion

China is India's largest trading partner with bilateral trade amounting to **$71.5 billion.**

Total imports during the last fiscal year stood at **$61.3 billion.**

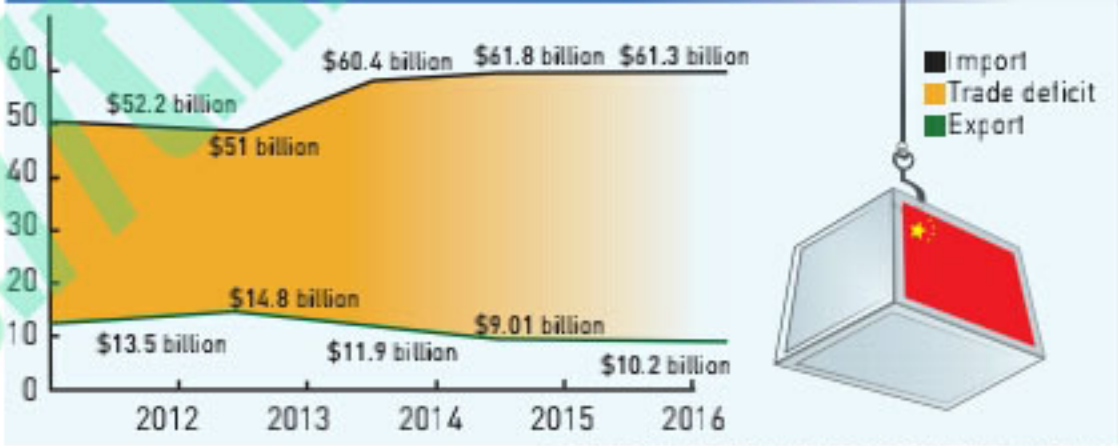
Total exports during the same period stood at **$10.2 billion.**

India's trade deficit with China ($52 billion) is **half of the country's overall deficit** ($106 billion)

Trade restrictions–disadvantage India

- India imports telecom gear worth **₹70,000 crore** annually from Chinese firms.
- Chinese companies control 51% of India's **$8 billion** smartphone industry.
- With a **51.31%** share, China is the largest source of high-tech manufactured goods for India
- **30%** of India's power generating capacity is imported from China.
- Between April 2016 and January 2017, China had a **87%** share in India's solar energy market.
- India only accounts for **2%** of China's exports.

India's trade deficit with China



GRAPHICS: SYAM KRISHNAN; RESEARCH: NEERAJ KRISHNAN

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FOCUS

Celebrating women's day

Acknowledging women leaders in business and corporate world

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FOCUS

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S DAY WITH WOMEN LEADERS

WHY BUSINESSES NEED A FEMININE VALUE-ADD

In this age of equal opportunity employment and shattered gender glass ceilings, is there any difference a woman entrepreneur or manager can make to a business that her male counterpart cannot?

Yes, believes Nazneen Jehangir, executive director of the NeST Group of companies, a diversified conglomerate that has interests in high-tech Manufacturing, Software, F & B, Infrastructure and Education & Training.

"A woman brings in the much-needed XX factor," she says, adding that this icing on the cake makes all the difference to an otherwise testosterone-charged business environment.

And, the difference is there to see in the software and education and training businesses that she presides over as the CEO. Jehangir takes a personal interest not just in ensuring the business remains at the cutting-edge of technology and quality, but also in aspects such as improving the gender mix of the workforce (it is already 35 per cent female and climbing), safety of women techies who might need to put in long hours and even the colour combinations of the interiors and the furnishings! "Empathy and caring come naturally to a woman," Jehangir says, adding, "They still matter in the cut-throat business place."

It is this soft-power that Jehangir brings to the boardroom of the NeST Group. She is the tough-talking CEO who sets targets for the sales teams, asking searching questions in the review meetings and formulating business strategy over power lunches—everything a male business leader would do. But, the value add comes in the way she flies down to create a personal rapport with the CIO of a premier bank in Dubai, ensuring the safety and comfort of a resource being sent onsite to the USA, reviewing the DJ and catering arrangements for the Xmas festivities on the campus or fund-raising for the CSR activities of the Group. Jehangir finds time for everything, as only a woman can.

Empathy and caring come naturally to a woman. They still matter in the cut-throat business place.
Nazneen Jehangir, executive director of the NeST Group of companies

Born to Nishi Jehangir and N. Jehangir, vice chairman & managing director of the Group, Nazneen, a trained engineer, joined the Group in 2009. She deliberately delayed the joining till after her first son was born, in order to maintain the work-life balance. Married to Binub Aziz, scion of another business family, she busts the feminist myth by acknowledging how her dad, brother Althaf Jehangir and husband play supportive roles in her professional and personal life.

Her inherent passion for technology has helped her successfully steer her 1,000-strong software team through the turbulent waters of digital technologies—IoT, AI, automation, analytics and now, the block chain. Her secret passion, however, is to set up a truly inclusive school in Kochi, where latent talents of children can blossom without the usual constraints of learning by rote and exams.

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The NeST Group

A growth story that celebrates inclusion...

As an equal opportunity employer since 1990, NeST Group acknowledges the exemplary contribution of women employees, who constitute a sizeable proportion of our resources, towards the tremendous growth and increased brand value of the Group. Women, after all, are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world and we believe in empowering and leveraging on this valuable resource.

On this International Women's Day, 2018, the NeST Group solemnly salutes the spirit of womanhood...

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forecast ■ By K.K. Vamanan Nampoothiri

MARCH 6 - 12

Aries
March 22-April 20

A rise in status and income is likely for some. New enterprises will be successful. Not a smooth week for those associated with the entertainment industry. Politicians will have a good week. There may be disputes with parents. Those fond of the fine arts will meet their icons. Business trips to a foreign land will be successful.

Lucky day—Friday: dream comes true

Taurus
April 21-May 21

Your relationship with senior officials will improve. A timely promotion is in the cards for some. Some of you might gain through iron, steel and timber business. Skilled workers will have a good week. Success in litigation is predicted. Being religious, you will cross difficulties with a smile. Travel enthusiasts have a good week ahead.

Lucky day—Friday: party time

Gemini
May 22-June 21

An excellent week for entrepreneurs. Some of you will show an interest in the occult. Your public relations will improve. Keep off politicians as they might give you a tough time. Exercise caution and be diplomatic. There may be a few worries on the domestic front. Travel for business or pleasure will be rewarding.

Lucky day—Wednesday: new friends

Cancer
June 22-July 23

Gains predicted in agency business or real estate. Some of you will fulfil your career ambition. You will rub elbows with people in power. Your colleagues will appreciate your ability to learn quickly and compliment good work. Friends will be your pillars of support. Time with family will be enjoyable.

Lucky day—Monday: an outing

Leo
July 24-August 23

You are advised against impulsive spending. Your confidence and energy will see you through the obstacles at work. Colleagues stand by you will improve. You might inherit a legacy. You will gain through your prudent and faithful life partner. Business partners will bring profit. Your advisory abilities will be put to test.

Lucky day—Monday: gift from a close friend

Virgo
August 24-September 23

Your energetic and authoritative nature commands respect. You stand to gain through the sale of oil seeds. A legacy in the form of a house or vehicle is in the cards. You might get a reliable domestic help. You will be philanthropic and will enjoy good health. Those in the export business will profit this week.

Lucky day—Monday: favourable for studies

Libra
September 24-October 23

Make good use of your fertile imagination. Journey to a foreign land brings financial gains. Advertising professionals will do well. Pack your bags for a long journey as the week is good for travel. Those in the entertainment industry will partner in creative ventures. You will gain through your siblings. Hidden enemies might spell trouble.

Lucky day—Thursday: gains via partner

Scorpio
October 24-November 22

Love at first sight or a quick marriage is in the cards for some. A favourable week for those in the banking sector this week. Government officials will prove helpful. A good week for educationists and researchers. Agriculturists stand to gain. Recognition for social activists and politicians likely.

Lucky day—Thursday: work acknowledged

Sagittarius
November 23-December 22

Speculation brings gains. A long and successful journey to a foreign land is in the cards for some. Children bring you good fortune. The week is good to start new ventures. Spend more time with family to recharge your batteries. Handle money with care. Air Force officers will do well. Keep off oily food this week.

Lucky day—Saturday: new ventures

Capricorn
December 23-January 20

You will be admired for your versatility. A timely promotion awaits some. Travel to a warm and sunny place will be revitalising. Social and financial gains through friends predicted. Businessmen and agriculturists will cross the week smiling. A break in studies is likely for students. Lady luck will smile on you.

Lucky day—Thursday: reward for your work

Aquarius
January 21-February 19

Journey to a foreign land will be especially enjoyable with a strange romantic interlude. Your popularity will increase at the workplace. Those in the service industry can look ahead for big gains. Your industriousness will be appreciated and you might be promoted. Be alert to developments around you.

Lucky day—Saturday: mother brings news

Pisces
February 20-March 21

Those retiring this week will have a good end to their career. Take care to avoid harsh words. Parents will be a source of support and inspiration. Domestic life will be blissful. Some of you might buy property or inherit a legacy. Some of you might travel to a foreign land on business but success awaits you at home.

Lucky day—Sunday: good health

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Pictures AND TALES

Andre Luetzen narrates stories of ordinary people through his visual language—photography

BY NIRMAL JOVIAL

Life in frames: A photograph from Andre Luetzen's series *Zhilli Byli*

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VIPIN DAS P.

While walking the streets of Hanoi in Vietnam, at night, a story revealed itself to ace German photographer Andre Luetzen. He saw that the doors and windows of homes were wide open, and that the living rooms were extended to the streets. The private and public spaces were flowing into each other, with no discernible boundaries. Intrigued, Luetzen wrote that story—in a visual language—through his photographic sequence *Public Private Hanoi*, which bagged the German Photo Book Award in 2012.

The stories, like Hanoi's, came to him accidentally throughout his career, he says. As did his medium of art—photography. "In the beginning, when I was a student at the art school, I wanted to become a filmmaker," says Luetzen. But, in films, team work is crucial. "I don't like working in teams," he says. "So, I decided to go into photography."

Luetzen was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1963. He completed his graduation in visual communication at the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg. In 1992, Luetzen joined the International Center of Photography, New York, for advanced studies. It was here that his skills were polished and fine-tuned. For the next ten years, he worked as a photojournalist for different magazines. One of his memorable assignments was about the life of a boy named Austin, from Belfast, Northern Ireland, which was then a conflict zone. "When I first met him, he was 13. I went back when he was 15 and 17. By then, he had become a member of the Irish Republican Army, and had been to jail a couple of times," says Luetzen. But, more than a political project, his focus was on the life of a human being growing up amid conflict.

Soon, however, he was fed up with being a photojournalist and turned towards art. He went back to his idea of becoming a filmmaker, but with a difference. He wanted to make films by sequencing single images. "This is more or less like a film," says Luetzen. "It is documentary photography. But, by the sequencing and trying to bring in connections, it is fiction, too. It twists the interpretation and reception a few degrees for the viewers, and gives them new meanings."

His pictures were featured in several international publications, and recognitions and grants soon followed. He taught photography at Folkwang University in Essen and at the Muthesius Art School in Kiel. He has also been conducting workshops, since 1995, in different parts of the world and has published 18 monographs. The most recent—*Up-river Book (Heart of Darkness)*—was a series of pictures he took while travelling up the Congo river in a UN patrol boat.

His works have been shown in exhibitions like the New York Photo Festival. His latest exhibition *Living Climate—A Tale of Three Cities* at Uru Art Harbour, Kochi, from January 17 to February 28, was an anthology exploring how climate affects the private lives of people in three different cities—Kochi in southern India during the monsoon (*Inside Out Kochi*), Arkhangelsk in north-western Russia during peak winter, with temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius (*Zhilli Byli*) and Khartoum, Sudan, in extreme summer, with temperatures as high as 45 degrees Celsius (*Khartoum*). *Living Climate* will also be exhibited in four other cities, including Bengaluru and Kolkata, soon.

The stories of the cities featured in *Living Climate* were in total contrast to what he experienced in Hanoi—he saw people being forced to keep themselves indoors due to the climate. In his work in

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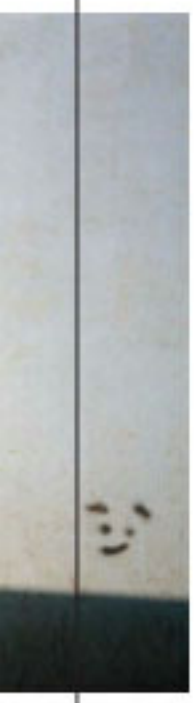

Three-eyed artist: (Clockwise from far left) Andre Luetzen; portraits from *Zhilli Byli; Inside Out Kochi;* and *Khartoum*

Arkhangelsk, Luetzen entered the homes of people preparing for the long winter, and explored how they adapted to their habitat. "There, people are not going outside with family, but rather prefer to stay inside," he says. In Khartoum, too, he saw that people preferred to stay inside because of the extreme heat. The city, which is the capital of Sudan, is the converging location of Blue Nile and White Nile. "Sometimes they go sit on the banks of the Nile river. But, that is not really public life," says Luetzen.

In 2014, he came to Kochi as part of a residency project of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. "I was thinking what can I do [in Kochi]. I was reading about the monsoon season and I thought this might be something," he says. Here he explored how monsoon restricts people to their homes. Acclaimed Indian artist and sculptor Riyas Komu, in his critique note on *Inside Out Kochi*, says, "[It] eschews sentimentality in favour of raw emotion and lets the story tell itself, forcing the reader to look beyond the impeccably composed plot and themes to the discordant riches that typifies postcolonial India." Komu pointed out during the preview of *Living Climate* that Luetzen's images cut deep into the emotional lives of the people and even when doing so, there is no voyeurism in his works.

"I explain what I do and I would introduce myself to people through an assistant or translator," says Luetzen. "Of course, there is spoken language, but there is a body language, too. People understand it without words." And, this is what he does to relax people—make them laugh. "When you laugh together for once, then all of a sudden, from nowhere, comes a bit of trust," he says.

Luetzen is currently working on the fourth and final stage of his *Perimeter* project—which is about his personal journeys to the border regions of Europe. He sees the project as an exploration of diversity of existing values in the "porous edges" of Europe and the untold stories of the European identity when it moves from big cities of the continent to its edges.

"Luetzen's subjects do not perform for the camera," says Leonhard Emmerling, director programmes South Asia, Goethe Institut, New Delhi. "It's like they forgot about the camera. He captures them in a moment where they are not even aware anymore that there is a camera."

One may find Luetzen to be a little old-school, as he uses only analogue technology for his projects. He uses a 6x7 medium format Mamiya 7II camera. But, he has a reason. "When I started photography, there was only analogue photography. But, continuing with this is something. It's a different quality," says Luetzen. "And, it is a different process of taking pictures. Here you have just ten-frames analogue. You have to see through the finder and you have to decide. So, you have to trust yourself."

But, he is not completely averse to digital photography. In his workshops, he uses digital. But, he is against the idea that everyone who carries a digital camera or smartphone is a photographer. "These are may be visual notes we are taking, and are not really pictures, although the quality of smartphone cameras are getting better and better," he says. "But, that is not photography. Photography is a process of working with tools like a camera to develop your own visual language. It is a process of getting deeper and deeper into a subject."

And, in every such deep-dive, the photographer in Luetzen captures infinite tales. ◆

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INTERVIEW *Perumal Murugan*

Exile gave me a chance to introspect

BY VIJAYA PUSHKARNA

His novels have themes that find resonance across society. But, five years after *Madhurobhagam*, a book about a childless couple, Tamil writer Perumal Murugan ran into trouble—Hindu outfits went to court saying the author had denigrated Lord Shiva. Threats followed and the writer exiled himself from writing, albeit for a few months.

His new book has a black goat named Poonachi as the hero. Poonachi is also the title of the English translation that was released on February 20.

What moulded the concerns we find in your books?

I have been writing from the time I was eight, and in college I was on the editorial board of the Marxist literary magazine, *Mano Osai*. I have been deeply influenced by Periyar and Ambedkar and their views on society. Post-modernism came to Tamil Nadu in the 1990s, and a writer could write about feminism, dalit issues, and social issues without any restriction.

Madhurobhagam was written in 2010, and the violent reaction came about 5 years later.

I did not expect the 1990s scenario to change. After the street protests, threats and court cases, I felt I failed as a writer in not anticipating this change. It gave me a chance to introspect.

How did the book fare in 2010?

In just January and February it sold 500 copies, which is a good sales figure for Tamil books. The story ends with the hero's dilemma—whether to hang himself or not. The response from readers was positive, except those who felt the hero may have committed suicide. In 2015, we published two sequels—one starting on the premise that the hero did not commit suicide, and the other taking it forward from his suicide.

How did you feel during your exile? And what did you first write when you came out of it?

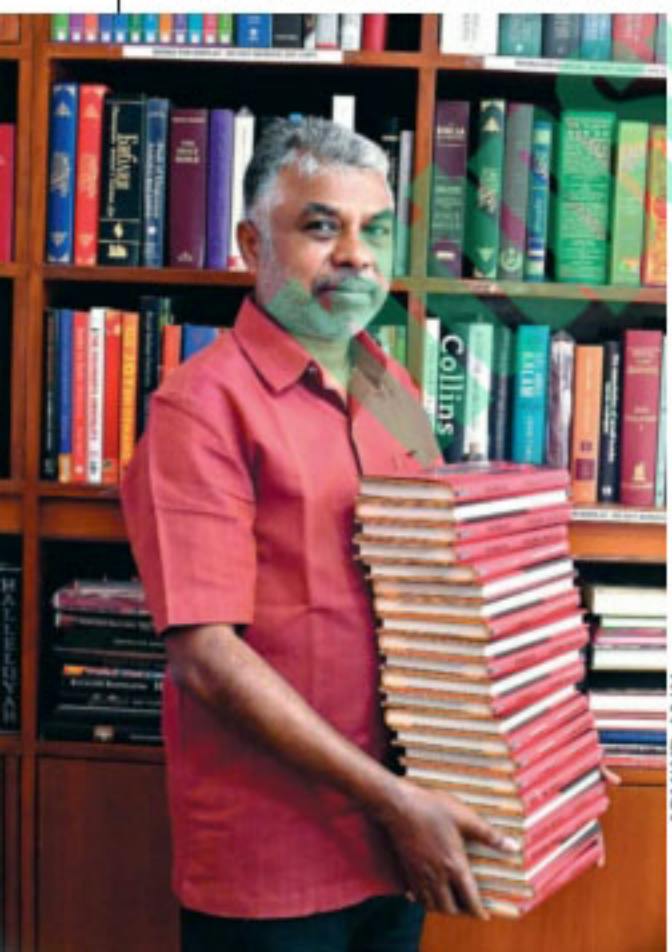
I felt a sense of loss, like I was in mourning. But, the three months sans writing went to my family. When I started again, I spontaneously wrote poems. They got published last year, under the title *Songs of a Coward*.

Why did you have a goat as your hero?

When I decided to write a novel after a year's gap, I thought it should be about something I knew very well. I had been a goatherd, I saw goats the first thing in the morning and the last thing in the evening, for years. And, goats have figured somewhere or the other in all my books.

What are you currently writing?

It is a novel—*Kalimugam*; the story is about the middle class. It will be released this year. ◆



ARVIND JAIN

WORLD CINEMA'S FINEST

FILM: INXEBA (XHOSA, SOUTH AFRICA, 2017]

Of men and morals

BY JOSE K. GEORGE

Ulwaluko is an initiation ritual into manhood, practised by people of the Xhosa community in South Africa. According to the ritual, adolescent boys (initiates) are forced into circumcision, followed by a recovery period, during which they stay in the forest, under the supervision of instructors. The ritual is supposed to help them prepare for adulthood.

Directed by John Trengove, *Inxeba* (The Wound), is a story of forbidden desire, flawed notions of masculinity, and loneliness, set against the background of Ulwaluko. Xolani, a soft-spoken, solitary factory worker is an instructor for Ulwaluko. When his initiate finds Xolani's real reason to be at the ritual, Xolani is disconcerted. Ulwaluko has failed to make Xolani 'man' enough to face a harsh world.

Trengove does not dwell on the hazards of the unhygienic practice of Ulwaluko, but sets it as a detailed background to narrate a tale of patriarchal notions of sexuality and of people who fail to wriggle out of it. In the end, the boys have their wound healed, but their notions and misconceptions about the world remain unchanged, while Xolani goes back with his secret intact.

Inxeba is a fascinating watch both because of detailed portrayal of Ulwaluko, and its critique of a tradition that asserts a faulty sense of masculinity.

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EXHIBITION

PHOTOS: SANJAY AHLAWAT

History revisited: Artist Riyas Komu (left) and his version of the 'Dancing Girl' (right) at the Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

Bose designed the Constitution

BY DHRITI GANDHI RANJAN

Riyas Komu's interest lies in archiving the times we live in. What he sees now is rising violence because of religious discrimination, communal polarisation and social tensions. This makes him feel that India is drifting away from the values enshrined in our Constitution.

The artist's solo exhibition Holy Shiver is his response to the rising militant tendencies. "Holy Shiver celebrates history, but also highlights a fear of where are we heading, and what recalibrations we have to make," he said.

The exhibition stems from a recent debate over changing the Indian Constitution. This alerted him to the need to change public perception and show that the country is deviating from the path it had embarked on.

Titled 'Fear 1', Komu showcases 26 pages of the Indian Constitution to celebrate the diversity and art in the book. "The Indian Constitution was designed by Nandalal Bose and his team of artists and calligraphers. People in India do not know how it looks," he said.

Komu's work also highlights certain icons and discourses emerging in India today. As values of Gandhi and Ambedkar often become a referral point, the artist merges their images in 'Dhamma Swaraj'. "There is a new discourse happening about them—the difference between their philosophies and the people who hold different extremes of their philosophical thinking," he said.

He pays tribute to the Ashoka Chakra, in a sculpture titled 'The Fourth Lion'. "It is a national symbol, which has been taken from strong Buddhist ideologies," he said. "In Indian symbolism, the fourth lion is not visible. That has always surprised me, and I thought about what that fourth lion was doing."

Komu's 'Fourth World' is a celebration of Ambedkar as an icon. "He was someone who was a philosopher, thinker and idealist, who stood for the downtrodden and created a Constitution that gives equal justice to every citizen.... This is the man we should learn from, but because of certain caste hierarchies, we dismiss his importance," Komu said.

The 'Dancing Girl' from Mohenjo-Daro may be an iconic sculpture, but Komu has dismissed the idea of giving it a historical reference of a mere dancing girl or an object of pleasure, in his work 'I Think Therefore I Am - II'. He has placed a portrait of a young artist behind the bronze sculpture.

"I am trying to show that the girl is a thinker, a reader of philosophy," he said. "It is a very contemporary statement that we all try to make, that you cannot manipulate us. I, as a person, am there because I can also think." ◆

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BOOK REVIEW

Inner Kaur

BY REKHA DIXIT

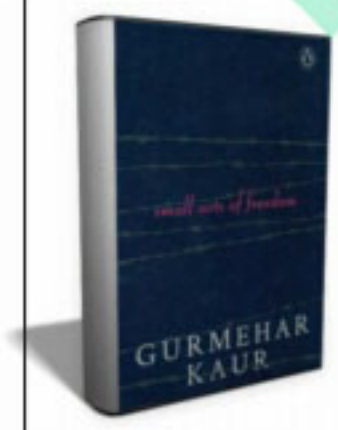
Gurmehar Kaur's everyday existence changed last year when she was trolled on social media for her participation in a peace campaign, following violent agitation in Delhi University. She became the unwilling and unwitting subject of a vitriolic debate on nationalism, when she posted a picture saying "Pakistan did not kill my dad, war killed him". The anger would have rattled anyone, let alone a 19-year-old. Kaur, however had the last word, when she said: "Real bullets killed my father. Your hate bullets are deepening my resolve."

The resolve has resulted in a book, a year later. *Small Acts of Freedom* tells of the ordinary grit of three generations of her family—she, her mother and her grandmother. The prose is simple, the chapters small. The narrative jumps from one character to another, following no linear chronology. It is an interesting style. There are the expected tear-wiping bits, which deal with the death of her father, and, then, the void he leaves behind. It is written without melodrama, stripped of flourish. Yet, its starkness hits you: *He comes back sleeping in a wooden box, with a bandage on his chest—on the same spot where I used to lean my tiny head against and sleep, listening to the rhythm of his heartbeat.*

Kaur writes about growing up fatherless. The first day in school when everyone was accompanied by their parents, she only had her mother. But, she moves on to other aspects of living. Like the chocolates her grandmother produced from behind the wall hanging. She writes of the life of both mother and grandmother, widowed early, and having to raise daughters single handedly. But, not alone. For she writes about the warmth of the extended family that cocooned her from the harshness of the real world.

There are some bits where it becomes a little pretentious. Like when she writes about the moment of epiphany she had at age six. *That day I learnt one of the most important lessons of my life: my father's weapons may have been guns and ammunition, but my weapon had to be peace. Always.*

But, what the heck. Kaur is a young author, and her debut book is straight from the heart. ◆



Small Acts of Freedom
By Gurmehar Kaur
Published by Penguin India
Price ₹299; pages 188

VIPIN DAS P.

HERITAGE RESTORATION

Noble fight: Lady Helen Hamlyn, philanthropist, at Chittoor Kottaram, Kochi

Government should be proactive

BY VAISAKH E. HARI

Lady Helen Hamlyn, one of the most famous philanthropists in Britain, is a leading advocate of restoration of heritage architectural sites across the world. The Helen Hamlyn Trust has played a significant role in the restoration of Ahhichatragarh (Nagaur Fort) in Rajasthan, Reis Magos Fort by the river Mandovi in Goa, and the Chittoor Kottaram, an erstwhile retreat of the Cochin Royal Family, which has now been turned into a heritage hotel. As one of the prominent voices for cultural preservation in India, the 84-year-old spoke to THE WEEK from the pristine settings of Chittoor Kottaram, where she currently stays.

Tell us a little about the activities of the group in India.

My husband Paul Hamlyn [the late philanthropist

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and publishing magnate] had a very large trust. When he was alive, I was one of the trustees. But he gifted me my own charitable foundation on my 50th birthday. After his passing, I looked after my own [Helen Hamlyn] trust—concentrating on heritage, something which I believe in deeply—while the Paul Hamlyn Foundation works mostly among the rural communities. You have such magnificent heritage and it needs to be conserved, [and it should be] free and open to the public.

And there is a significant amount of history involved.

Yes. In Rajasthan, you can see the architecture clearly influenced by the Mughals. Kerala architecture is far different, with beautiful settings, often near waterbodies. The Ahhichatragarh Fort [once near ruins after its tenure as state government offices and Border Security Force outposts] in Nagaur was a hub of activity; Sufi strains mixed with the local culture in the lower part of the Silk Route. The third Mughal emperor Akbar built a little water garden there, which can still be seen. The Chittoor Kottaram has a beautiful story behind it, given that the Raja of Cochin built it as a retreat to be close to the Chittoor Sree Krishnaswamy Temple.

In India, we have a confluence of cultures like the Mughal, French and Portuguese, all mixed and matched with countless others. In such a complex tapestry, how and where do you start when it comes to restoration?

The first thing we do is look at why the building was constructed. Most of the now-vast structures started small, and elements were added later on. You have to decide what the building is best used for. Keeping the essence intact is very important. The structure, at the end of the process, has to be brought forward into this century, looking exactly the same and its value unaffected.

Apart from Nagaur, Goa and Kochi, what are your activities elsewhere?

We have also worked on Khajuraho, which belongs to the Archaeological Survey of India. We worked on the [Reis Magos] fort in Goa, and that turned out to be quite a battle [against red tape]. We tried very hard to get a chance to restore Bolgatty Palace [in Kochi], but that failed.

Just how necessary is it to ensure restoration in the Indian architecture scene?

We have to have the sensitivity to understand what to do, and more importantly, what not to do. The government should be more proactive in a country where almost all these structures belong to the state. They have to understand that they have a jewel in their hands. ◆

IN FOCUS

New Torchbearers for the year 2018-19

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is a statutory body established by the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 for the regulation of the profession of Chartered Accountants in India. The affairs of the ICAI are managed by a Council in accordance with the provisions of the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 and the Chartered Accountants Regulations, 1988. The Council is composed of 40 members of whom 32 are elected by the members and remaining 8 are nominated by the Central Government generally representing the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders.

On February 12, 2018, ICAI elected its new torchbearers CA. Naveen N.D. Gupta as the President and CA. Prafulla P. Chhajed as the Vice-President for year 2018-19.

CA. Naveen N.D.Gupta
President, ICAI (2018-19)

A man of professional wisdom, vision and strong organizational skills with a firm belief in inclusive growth of Indian accountancy profession, CA. Naveen N.D. Gupta has been elected as the new President of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) by its 23rd Council, on February 12, 2018. A seasoned professional from Delhi with 22 years of standing, CA. Naveen N.D. Gupta is widely commended for his role in making the Income Disclosure Scheme, 2016 a success, which was acknowledged by the Finance Minister. His association as Central Council Member at ICAI, now running in 9th year since 2010, with position as Vice-President in 2017-2018; has made him traverse regimen of standard setting, quality assurance framework, and disciplinary mechanism.

CA. Prafulla Chhajed
VP, ICAI (2018-19)

A blend of erudition, experience, foresight, technical expertise and professional excellence worth emulating, CA. Prafulla Chhajed , has been elected as the Vice-President of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) by its 23rd Council, on February 12, 2018. A Fellow Chartered Accountant from Mumbai with over 20 years of experience in Auditing & Taxation, he is a prolific speaker at national and international forum and has been contributing to various Publications.

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EXPERIENCE

Trick art

Lessons from a curious art exhibition

BY SNEHA BHURA

At first, they looked like garish masks carved in brass and steel. One could also mistake them for blown-up stickpins in antique gold. In fact, I was certain they resembled relics of Buddhist art, perhaps a comment on the preservation of Tibetan identity in exile.

Little did I anticipate that Shweta Bhattad's installation at Khoj's fundraiser exhibition on its 20th anniversary was alluding to pigs which attack women in rural areas, when they venture out in the dark to answer the call of nature. I should have done my homework. I should have known that Bhattad hails from the village of Paradsinga in Maharashtra; land issues and the plight of farmers have been a recurring theme in her art.

But, some art exhibitions are meant to confound and rattle, no matter how well you come prepared. You must allow yourself to enter a maze and come out neurologically scrambled.

A fellow visitor wisely remarked at the end of this macabre ride that "contemporary art is tricky". And I could only muse on the possibilities of the word 'tricky'. How many shades of 'tricky' can you handle?

For those who are so inclined, there is sci-fi art with artists like Sahej Rahal playing around with drawings of monsters, shamanic creatures and Jedi masters in 'While We Were Away'. Other themes include grief and coming to terms with loss. Personal tragedies are embodied in objects as simple as the last four pages from a deceased father's music book, now yellowed with time. Or delicately threaded botanical motifs, which were once drawn by the artist's mother, who was an expert weaver.

And, then the inimitable mini sculptures in 'Portraits of Home/Exit Wounds' by Goa-based Sahil Nayak. He recreates old, crumbling living rooms, with wooden furniture and pages of a tiny calendar fluttering in the breeze.

There is urban loneliness, industrial expansion, and crime, too. Like the hyper-realistic paintings by Abir Karmarkar, who gives us two fused bulbs placed on a forensic tray, which look like artifacts from a murder scene. Or that strange water-colour of an animal-machine hybrid called 'The Bull' by Prabhakar Pachpute, who was born into a family of coal miners in Chandrapur, where machines have replaced livestock for mining activities.

If you survive this brain-melting exercise, you will come out stronger and wiser. You will learn that it is okay to invest in art that is not permanent and does not give you everlasting joy. It tells you why happiness is overrated, and that in the end, we are all terminal cases. ◆

Old is gold: Sahil Nayak's 'Portraits of Home'

GADGETS

Screen test

BY REUBEN JOE JOSEPH

It's going to be all screen, very soon. Which is to say that the face of your mobile phone will soon be 100 per cent display. And, the first step towards that is the new screen aspect ratio that is stirring the market.

At the 2017 World Mobile Congress, LG had introduced the first smartphone with an 18:9 screen ratio—the length by width of the phone's screen, excluding the bezel around it. This, in effect, is the length of the display being twice its width, when compared to the 16:9 ratio that most phones possess.

Several phone manufacturers took the cue from LG, and have been flooding the market with phones of similar dimensions. The Samsung Galaxy S8, iPhone X, Redmi Note 5 and Honor 7X are all phones that have made the transition to the longer screen.

Shifting to this new screen proportion means that if the phone's body dimensions are kept constant, the width of the bezel surrounding the screen will reduce, giving you more display area.

It also means that as the screen size increases diagonally, your phone gets longer, but not so much broader. And, sleeker phones are certainly more convenient to hold, operate and slide into your pocket. It helps you read more on a single page, but the downside is that videos that come in 16:9 format will have black bars on either side.

Vivo introduced the first under-screen fingerprint sensor last month, and Samsung recently patented the insertion of the under-screen front camera. Both features will work under the normal display. And, if you think about it, all this could eventually lead to that mythical 100 per cent screen-to-body ratio. ◆

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PEOPLE

END OF THE ROAD

The Weinstein Company announced plans to file for bankruptcy, after its co-founder **Harvey Weinstein** was accused of sexual harassment by more than 80 women. "While we recognise that this is an extremely unfortunate outcome for our employees, our creditors and any victims, the board has no choice," the company's statement said. It has produced Oscar-winning films like *Silver Linings Playbook* and *The King's Speech*.

AFP

FOOD PORN

Chef, television personality and author **Alton Brown** says that Instagram has done to food what porn has done to sex. He says that posting images of our food on Instagram and putting on filters to make it more attractive has given us unattainable beauty standards for food. "We must eat the ugly food," he said. "We do not have a food shortage. We just have food we refuse to eat."

AP

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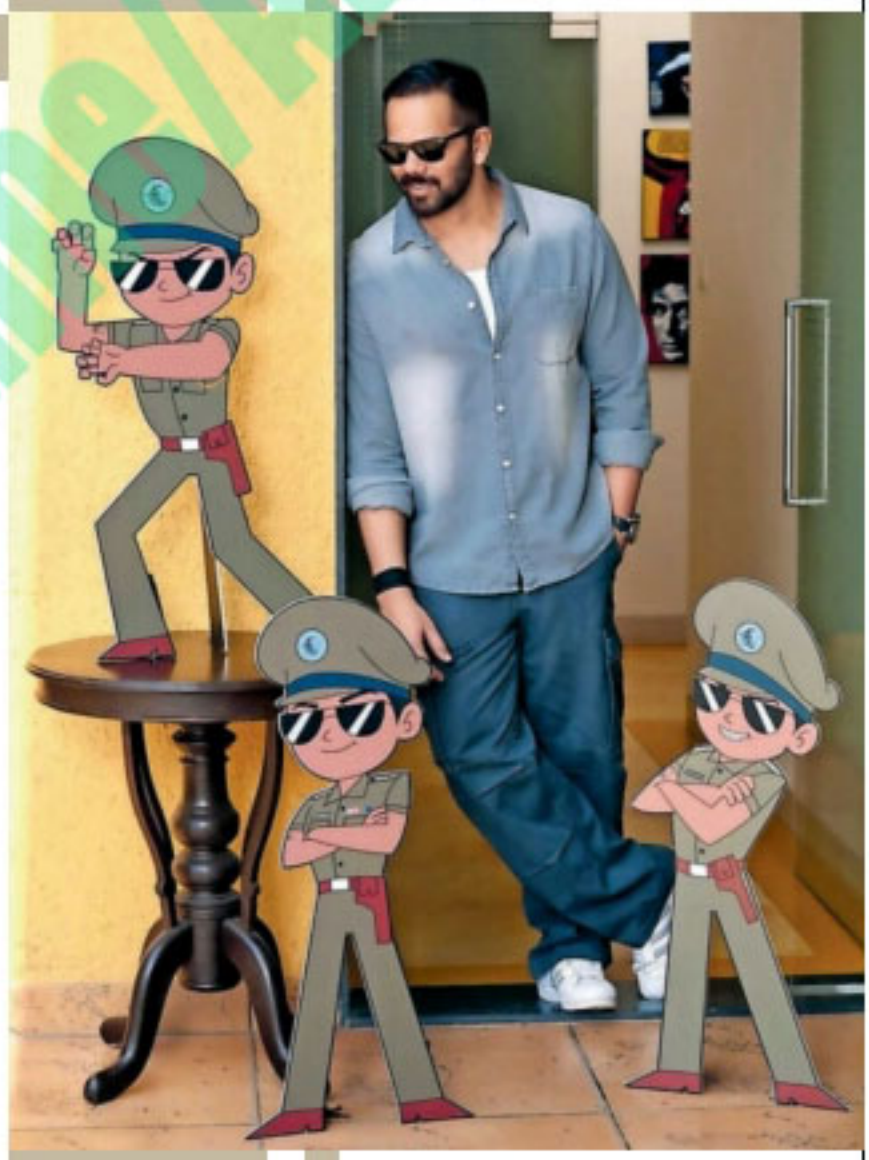
PTI

KISS AND HELL

Musician Angarag Mahanta, popularly known as **Papon**, is in trouble. He was caught grabbing an 11-year-old contestant's face and kissing her on a Facebook live-stream for the reality singing show for kids, *Voice India Kids*. The channel hosting the show fired him from his role as judge and mentor to the children. Papon described the incident as "affectionate".

THREE'S A CROWD

In a talk show, **Malaika Arora Khan** revealed that senior models like Mehr Jessia and Namrata Shirodkar tried to stop her from rising through the ranks. "Back in the day, the girls backstage were kind of ganged up [against] by senior models," she said. "They were not mean, but they ganged up against me." She added that since then, she's become good friends with them.



TREAT FOR TOTS

Filmmaker **Rohit Shetty** is launching a new animation series called *Little Singham* for children in April, inspired by the Ajay Devgn-starrer *Singham*. "*Singham* was hugely loved by the kids, and a show like this will not only take the franchise ahead but will also become a source of entertainment for the kids and audiences who love *Singham* so dearly," said Shetty.

CONTRIBUTORS: DHRITI GANDHI RANJAN AND SNEHA BHURA
COMPILED BY ANJULY MATHAI

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last word • Shashi Tharoor

Clementis's hat, Gandhi's glasses

In the Czech novelist Milan Kundera's brilliant novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, he tells the story of a communist party stalwart, politburo member and hero of the Soviet-backed revolution that ended democracy in Czechoslovakia for half a century. The gentleman, Clementis, was among the select band of leaders who stood on a balcony waving to assembled party supporters as the annual military parade filed past in 1948. A famous photo shows him, sturdy and stone-faced, acknowledging the dutiful cheers of the throng, along with his party boss Gottwald. Since it is snowy and cold, and Gottwald is bareheaded, Clementis has taken off his fur hat and placed it on his comrade's head.

But, soon after the photo was published, Clementis fell out of favour. Some ideological heresy, no doubt, led to him being denounced as a class enemy, a traitor to the party and an enemy of the people. His fall was swift: he was dismissed and executed. His role in the revolution was not just forgotten; it was erased from the official histories authorised by the party. His portraits were taken down, his photos deleted from all communist documents. Then worse followed: records of his participation in historic events were expunged.

There remained one problem, however. He had been a participant, along with those who were still in power, in a number of occasions that could not simply be struck from the record. His presence in photographs of those events was a reminder that the communist leaders had once nurtured an apostate in their midst. This was intolerable.

Technology permitted a decisive solution to the problem. The original negatives were retrieved, and Clementis was carefully air-brushed out of the pictures. Where Clementis stood, there was now only a gap, a void, an absence. It was the ultimate communist repudiation: they not only destroyed his future, but also abolished his past.

The famous picture on the balcony was no exception. Where he had once stood upright next to Gottwald, there was now a bare wall. The photo was republished in various newspapers, documents and publicity materials, but the only version of it allowed to appear was the doctored one. The communists knew that human memory fades; only photographs remain.

But, the diligent photographic artist who had applied his airbrush techniques to the original photograph had omitted one detail in expunging Clementis from the photograph—the fur hat remained resting on Gottwald's head. The man had been erased,

BHASKARAN

but his hat was still there—a silent reminder of his original presence.

Something similar has happened in our country. No, we are not yet a dictatorship where only authorised versions of the past can be circulated. But our rulers are busy air-brushing our history, too: Maharashtra's history schoolbooks have now eliminated the Mughals, and Rajasthan's tells us that Maharana Pratap won the Battle of Haldighati. Inconvenient facts can be erased from our memory, if we just don't acknowledge they happened.

And, we now have our equivalent of Kundera's hat as well. Everything that Mahatma Gandhi stood for is being trashed by our current rulers: The apostle of *ahimsa* is betrayed daily by those who inflict violence on the defenceless. The man who said noble ends cannot be served by ignoble means is cited by rulers who will stop at nothing to get their way. The great soul who worked tirelessly for peace and communal harmony is cited by a governing party whose MPs have said they want his statues replaced by those of his assassin.

Despite all this, Gandhi the brand is too valuable to be junked by the marketing gurus who now rule us. And so, they have reduced his message to that of sanitation: the symbol of the government's Swachh Bharat campaign is a pair of the Mahatma's glasses.

The Mahatma said one should start by cleansing one's own mind and heart first. This, our government is incapable of. So the Mahatma's message, spirit and soul have vanished from today's India. His ideals are gone. Only his glasses remain.

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